

Sponsorship

A Getting Started Guide



This literature has been locally produced by the Sacramento Valley Intergroup of OA. The content reflects the experience, strength and hope of our Sacramento area members. It is not OA Conference- or board-approved and does not represent OA as a whole.

<https://www.sacvalleyoa.org/documents.html>

May 2019

“Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from alcohol (compulsive overeating) as intensive work with other alcoholics (compulsive overeaters). It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics (compulsive overeaters)! You can help when no one else can.”

-Alcoholics Anonymous, p.89

This literature has come about because in 2016, the Sacramento Valley Intergroup Sponsorship Work Group conducted a survey to find out why there was such a shortage of sponsors in the area and what could be done about it. The results of that survey found that existing sponsorship literature was not sufficient and recommended the development of a step-by-step guide on how to prepare people to become sponsors. A team of Sacramento-local people has therefore developed this Guide.

A special thank-you goes to the 18 long-timer sponsor contributors who share here how they sponsor, the 16 members of the Sacramento Valley Intergroup (SVIOA) who agreed to review this Guide, the seven long-timers who contributed editorial content, and the five sponsors and soon-to-be new sponsors who gave us their feedback.

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Sponsorship

A Getting-Started Guide

Locally produced by Sacramento Valley Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous (SVIOA).
Based on the experience of Sacramento area OA members. Not OA-approved

You've made the decision to sponsor or your own sponsor is suggesting you begin. And you may be feeling a little nervous about how to get started. Here are some basic guidelines that our local members have found helpful in their experience.

A Sponsor's Primary Responsibility

A sponsor's primary responsibility is to help a sponsee work the Twelve Steps and to apply the 12 principles to their lives.

The 12 Steps and 12 Principles

STEP 1: The Spiritual Principle is HONESTY

We admitted we were powerless over food, that our lives had become unmanageable.

STEP 2: The Spiritual Principle is HOPE

Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

STEP 3: The Spiritual Principle is FAITH

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

STEP 4: The Spiritual Principle is COURAGE

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

STEP 5: The Spiritual Principle is INTEGRITY

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

STEP 6: The Spiritual Principle is WILLINGNESS

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

STEP 7: The Spiritual Principle is HUMILITY

Humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings.

STEP 8: The Spiritual Principle is LOVE

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

STEP 9: The Spiritual Principle is SELF-DISCIPLINE

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

STEP 10: The Spiritual Principle is PERSEVERANCE

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

STEP 11: The Spiritual Principle is AWARENESS

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.

STEP 12: The Spiritual Principle is SERVICE

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

A. General Tips on Sponsoring ¹

(see ENDNOTES at the end of the Guide for sources for Sections (A) – (D))

1. You don't have to know all the answers, only where to find them (e.g. in the program literature).
2. Work your own program to the best of your ability.
3. Be honest and open about your own program.
4. Share your experience, but remember, the sponsee's experience may be different – and that's okay.
5. Share both your successes and hard times.
6. Explain to a new sponsee that we have a disease that includes an allergy of the body and an obsession of the mind and we have to learn how to live our lives without triggering the allergy.
7. Let them know that the solution to our disease is spiritual.
8. Agree on exactly what you will do and what they will do on things such as food plans, calling, writing, etc. It may be a very specific or very general agreement, and the agreement may change.
9. Listen, accept and support, but always offer program. That is really all we have to give.

B. What Does A Sponsor Do?

A Sponsor Does

- share their experience strength and hope.
- share their struggle.
- let the sponsee know they are both one bite away from compulsively overeating.
- share up to the level of their own experience.
- help a sponsee work the 12 Steps by providing explanation, guidance, and encouragement.
- help a sponsee get established quickly in the OA Fellowship by explaining basic concepts and terminology and by introducing the sponsee to other members.
- help a sponsee in the process of self-examination that the Steps require.
- encourage a sponsee to read the basic texts of the OA Fellowship and other program literature.
- encourage a sponsee to engage in Fellowship activities and service.
- encourage a sponsee to stay on the recovery path.
- remind a sponsee to apply the 12 Step principles in their lives.
- share that many OA's have found outside help useful.
- encourage a sponsee to use the OA Tools.
- encourage a sponsee to reach out and build a recovery network.
- explain that the OA program addresses our physical, emotional and spiritual disease and is not only about weight loss.

C. What A Sponsor Does Not Do

A Sponsor Does Not

- think it's their job to get someone to recover.
- allow themselves to be put on a pedestal.
- act as a nutritional counselor, therapist, or Higher Power.
- attempt to control a sponsee's life or encourage an unhealthy dependence.
- need to blame themselves if a sponsee doesn't work out.
- give professional advice.
- make promises.
- hesitate to mention God when they are first explaining the program and their experience to newcomers.

D. Guiding a Sponsee Through the Steps

A sponsor's number one responsibility is to guide a sponsee through the 12 Steps. If you haven't been through all 12 Steps, help them through the highest Step you've completed, then refer them to someone with more experience for the remaining Steps.

How to Start

Pamphlets: A Guide for Sponsors Sponsoring Through the 12 Steps

- Read "A Guide for Sponsors."
- Read "Sponsoring Through the 12 Steps."
- Raise your hand at meetings when sponsors are called for.

Pamphlet: Where Do I Start? Everthing A Newcomer Needs to Know

- Be sure a new sponsee receives a copy of this newcomer pamphlet.
- Read **Where Do I Start?** closely before working with a new sponsee.
- Go through the pamphlet with them so that they understand the program and get many of their early questions answered.

Overview of Contents of Where Do I Start?

- 15 Questions (to determine if you have a problem with food)
- You Are Not Alone
- Many Symptoms, One Solution
- Abstinence: Our Primary Purpose
- The Tools of Recovery
- Further Information: A Plan of Eating
- Plans of Eating
- Frequently Asked Questions – and Answers
- Opening and Closing Prayers and Readings
- A Final Welcome
- Additional Literature Resources

When you begin working with someone...

- Explain how sponsoring them helps you with your program.
- Let them know that everything they tell you is confidential.
- Let them know that the two of you will be “trying out” the sponsor/sponsee relationship.
- That it’s okay for either one of you to decide if it’s a good match or not.

Be in regular contact with your sponsee.

- Set up a plan to be in regular phone communication with your sponsee.
- This can mean daily, weekly or however often you think would be useful.
- Keep the time on the phone program-oriented.
- Set up a regular time to meet with your sponsee.
- When possible, meet face-to-face to read and discuss OA literature.
- Encourage your sponsee to use the tools.

Remember...

- We don’t know what’s best for another person.
- We have a program of action to share with those who will take it.
- Each of us has our own path to take and our own story.
- We only know what’s helped us get better, and we share that with them.

Abstinence – Our Primary Purpose (see Where Do I Start? page 5)

In OA, abstinence is “the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program.”

Food Plans Support Abstinence

Helping a sponsee find a food plan

Our program literature says that we are all allowed to develop our own food plan.

Pamphlet: “A Plan of Eating” (<http://bookstore.oa.org/>)

Pamphlet: “Dignity of Choice” (<http://bookstore.oa.org/>)

- Encourage your sponsee to read these pamphlets.
- Encourage your sponsee to read pp 5-17 of Where Do I Start? pamphlet.
- Ask your sponsee to honestly identify any foods they cannot eat safely.
- Suggest they consult with a health/nutritional professional if necessary.

Local OA's share how they sponsor.

DISCLAIMER: These members are sharing what works for them, and reflect a variety of ways to sponsor. These are choices of the individual rather than official OA procedures.

I don't require they call me every day.

The first thing I say to a newcomer is talk to me about what you are looking for in a sponsor. And then I suggest we get together for coffee or a chat after the meeting. I usually just sponsor 2 to 3 people at a time. And I don't require they call me every day. They call when they need to talk or they are having a problem. I prefer face-to-face meetings with my sponsees. I primarily use the Big Book to sponsor, and lately I've added the new *Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide*, which I am currently going through with a sponsor (we co-sponsor each other). We read, we write on the reading, then we get together and share on what we wrote. After I work the Steps with a sponsee, we go on to the Traditions. If they want to talk about food, fine. I don't care what people eat. When I started working with a sponsor, I did call every day and I did commit my food. I strongly suggest that sponsees go to 2-3 meetings a week. I suggest they do service. I strongly encourage my sponsees to start sponsoring others when they are ready. But they need to be abstinent, otherwise it's a problem. I don't "fire" sponsees. If things aren't working out, or if one or both of us is uncomfortable, I say "I think this might not be a good match."

I don't have a set formula, but it involves lots of writing and working steps.

So the first thing I do is suggest we get together to see if it might be a good fit. We need to talk about what they want in a sponsor and what I can offer; also how often we meet and how we are going to work together. I don't have a set formula. But it will involve lots of writing and working steps. I assign reading in the Big Book & the OA 12x12 (e.g., about Step 1), and then I ask them to highlight any passage that jumps out at them and to write on it. Sometimes I suggest they go back and read it a second or even a third time to see what comes up. I personally focus on the Big Book and the 12 Steps I use both the Big Book and the OA 12x12. Sometimes I use the AA 12x12. I have no criteria, no requirements; I encourage my sponsees to go to 3 meetings a week, have a defined abstinence. One requirement for a sponsee is that I expect them to sponsor once they have worked the steps. There is no specific time for that. It feels like after they complete Steps 4 & 5. Even if you have only one day of abstinence, you have one day more than the newcomer. They need to sponsor. They need to raise their hand at meetings. They need to sit down with someone and find out what they want. They need to tell them what they have to offer. The sponsee can say "Let's work together for 30 days; 2 months; etc) and then reassess to see if it's a match. If it doesn't work out, you can say "This isn't a good fit for me"... and make it about you and not them. Or tell them you are willing to be their temporary sponsor. Say.. "I've never sponsored before, let's see if it works for you and me." I believe that everyone in OA must be willing to sponsor.

I ask them to call me every day for 30 days

The first thing I say is "let's talk about it." Then I ask him (I don't sponsor women) to call me every day for 30 days. The purpose of those 30 phone calls is to establish "familiarity", so the phone no longer weighs 5,000 pounds, and to see if he is willing to take direction. And it works both ways because those calls are helping me at the same time as they are helping him. If he skips a day, we start the 30 days over. After the 30 days are complete, we call when needed. Sometimes I call them just to check in. We are in this together now. I ask him "Did you get a Big Book yet? Have you bought the OA 12x12 yet?" Then I ask him to read the Big Book from the very beginning (Preface, Forwards, Doctor's Opinion, Bill's Story, Step 1) up until Chapter 2. And I ask him to read Step 1 in the OA 12x12. I ask him "How's the food going? Have you attained your goals with food yet? What do you think the problem is? Do you have a Plan of Eating?" For me the goal is freedom from food obsession and dieting, not weight loss. So I ask him "What is the actual problem?" And we take a closer look at addiction by re-visiting pp xxvi, which focuses on the obsession, the compulsion and the allergy. Then we move on to Chapter 2,3 & 4 in the OA 12x12. We read it every day. We break down Step 1 into 16 paragraphs and I ask him to write his comments on each paragraph. After a week, we read Step 1 together and he shares his comments. While I don't food sponsor, I suggest my sponsee find a plan of eating and check out the Dignity of Choice pamphlet. I also suggest that he go to 3 meetings a week and I share that I went to a meeting a day for my first eleven years in OA (sometimes two or more meetings a day!) It's called "going to any lengths". I suggest that my sponsee begin sponsoring others after he has completed Step 5. And there are always things he can do to help a newcomer besides sponsoring. I go up to (male) newcomers, get their phone numbers and call them. I welcome them. I tell them I'm glad they are here. And we help each other. That's the way this program works.

A lot of people say they WANT a sponsor, but are not willing to pick up the phone.

When someone asks me to sponsor them, I spend some time talking with them. If they are new, I ask them if they have any questions. I just want to get them to talk so I can address any of their fears right out of the gate. Then I ask them to call me. A lot of people say they WANT a sponsor, but they are not willing to pick up the phone. I tell them my cell phone number is private and they can also text me. I have a do-not-disturb feature on my phone so they can call me any time night or day and they will not be disturbing me. If I answer the phone, it lets them know I am available to talk. So if they do call me, I begin by taking them through the steps. I use the OA 12x12 Workbook. If they can't afford to buy it, I say no problem I'll send them the questions. So there is no excuse not to get started on Step 1 right away. I usually meet with my sponsees once a month. I prefer to meet before or after one of the meetings I personally attend, and that way I also get to see them regularly. They do not need to clean up their food before working the steps. I tell them what worked for me was I started sending my food to my sponsor. Each evening I sent what I planned to eat the next day. At the end of the next day I sent what I actually ate. This helped me to be honest about my food and also to not beat myself up if I had some kind of slip. This is a disease of isolation. Being honest about my food brings it out into the light. There is a beginning and an end to what I ate. I don't need to spend a lot of time stressing out about it. I suggest that sponsees attend three meetings a week (two meetings to survive; three meetings to thrive.) Prayer and meditation has had a huge positive impact on my recovery, so I suggest they start with daily meditation. I encourage sponsees to get a service position and to hang out after meetings to talk with people. I suggest that a sponsee starts sponsoring someone after they have completed Steps 4 and 5.

I sponsor using the Big Book, the OA 12x12 book and workbook.

I will help a newcomer find a sponsor, but I generally sponsor old timers having trouble or returning members. I suggest we get together and talk about it. If they are looking for someone to call them out on their program or check up on them, that's not me. I'm more like their partner in recovery. I warn them that I'm not "hard core". They are going to have to run their own show. So when I work with someone who has already been in program I ask them which tools they are using. Have they been through the steps before? What did they learn? How much time are they putting into their program? I ask them to write every day. I ask them to work on developing their relationship with God. Meditation is very important. It doesn't have to be long (I meditate about 5-10 minutes a day). I find out when they want to talk on the phone. More than once a week. And it's very important that we get together about every two weeks in person. I work with my sponsee to organically come up with a plan together on how we are going to work the steps. I sponsor using the Big Book, the OA 12x12 book and workbook. I am now also using the green OA 12 Step Workshop Guide. It has some really good questions to write on. But there are all kinds of good questions online. We read out of the Big Book, AA and OA 12x12 and work on each step through those books. Ideally I suggest they start sponsoring after completing Steps 4 & 5.

I ask them to do what I do.

Here is what I expect from a sponsee: A "Daily Renewal Call:" call me every day with (food or) action plan; talk voice to voice with me once a week. Say the Serenity Prayer and answer the following: Step 1 (What are you willing to admit you're powerless over today?), Step 2 (Have you come to believe that a power greater than yourself can restore you to sanity?) Step 3 (Do you make a decision to turn your will and your life over to the care of your Higher Power today? And will you?) Steps 4 & 5 (What would you like to bring to light from the past 24 hours?) Steps 6-12 (How are you going to work your program in the next 24 yours?) Say the 3rd step prayer. Don't decide that you've broken your abstinence without talking to me. Call me before you break your abstinence. Tell the truth. Leave a message with your check-in if you don't reach me. If you need me to call you back, text me and I will make every effort to call you back. Shoot to meet face to face once a month. I ask them to do what I do, which is to meditate and pray every day; read 12-Step literature; write in a journal every day—including writing 20 things you are grateful for from that day; go to three meetings a week; maintain your abstinence; give service (sponsor when you become eligible), take phone numbers of other people in OA; call or text one of them besides me every day so you have other people on your OA team; take at least one service position at the group level. Here is what they can expect from me: I will call them back whenever I can; I will make myself available to work steps and talk with them. I will let them down (only their Higher Power is always there for them).

I screwed up sponsoring my first two years, but I learned a lot and nobody was ever harmed by my mistakes.

I say “thank you for asking”. It takes a lot of courage to ask someone to sponsor you. I ask them what they want from a sponsor and arrange to get together and talk. I recommend they go to three meetings a week and at least one meeting where I go so I can see them there. I ask them to call me daily. The first thing we do is an eating and food history. They can go back as far as they want. Write out when food controlled them. When did they feel ashamed about their eating or food? When did food keep them from doing things they wanted to do? What types of food caused them challenges? This is their first writing exercise. And we look at 5 parameters around the food: when, how, where, why and what. And then we pick just one thing to take action on (e.g., 3 meals a day; a meal with a beginning and an end; no dessert foods, no eating in the car etc.). Next I have them read the Doctor’s Opinion in the Big Book. We use the Big Book Dictionary to help clarify any words that may be confusing to them. I ask them to read Step 1 in the OA 12x12, and write on step questions from the OA Workbook or the new Twelve Step Study Guide. We also start integrating the 9 tools. I try to meet with them every 7-10 days. If an issue comes up and I don’t have any experience, strength and hope, I call my sponsor (or another OA) for help. I suggest they take a service position at one of their meetings, and if they have a solid plan of eating and are working the steps, I suggest they can become a food sponsor. After completing Steps 4 & 5, I ask them to get a newcomer’s phone number, call and welcome them, ask them how their day is going and offer to help them figure out a food plan. And I have them role play making a phone call with me. I also tell them that they may screw it up at first, and that I was a brutal step sponsor my first two years. If people didn’t do it my way, they were doing it wrong. I learned a lot. But nobody was ever harmed by my mistakes.

I really work with people who have the “gift of desperation.”

I will tell a newcomer: “I am willing to sponsor you, but I really work with people who have the “gift of desperation”. Do they have the “gift of desperation? Are they willing to do everything suggested by this program to get well? I’m not an easy sponsor. I ask them to do 3 things; (1) write down their food and send it to me; (2) let me know what times we can talk each day; (3) they must do my assignments. Food history is step 0. I have them write up a food history which includes their earliest memory regarding how they used food differently than other people. I have them break down their writing in ten year increments (age 0-10; 10-20; 20-30, etc.) I ask them to write WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW did they eat? What was different about it? How did they know or realize they were taking a “compulsive bite”, and that it wasn’t really about being hungry? When did they start gaining weight? What methods did they try to control their weight? Did they succeed? Did they fail? I usually have them start by crafting a food plan they can live with one day at a time the rest of their lives. It must be abundant. And I note to them that they will be re-feeding themselves whether they have been restricting or bingeing. They need to get their body chemistry right. Then I have them work the steps by writing on and defining each word of the steps one word a day. We discuss daily their assignment, their abstinence and their challenges. I also strongly suggest my sponsees use the tools. I stress that they need to get to at least 3 meetings per week, they MUST raise their hand and share at meetings as being an available sponsor, talk to people before and after the meeting and make at least 2-3 calls a day. I have them do writing every day. My goal is to get through Step 4 as soon as possible. To especially focus on “what was THEIR PART”. They have GOT TO FORGIVE these people. And they have GOT TO FORGIVE themselves. I immediately start them sponsoring after 21 days.

I tell them they need to make a list of other people to call besides me

I tell the newcomer that there are lots of different ways to sponsor and suggest we get together for coffee. I usually ask what brought them to OA and what they want. I tell them that the first job of a sponsor is to help them work through the steps. To “work the steps”, we will be reading each step from the OA 12x12, AA 12x12, and Big Book and then they will have a writing assignment. I tell them we need to get together at least once a month and do a step a month. We get together more frequently if they are ready sooner. I ask them to call me at least once a week, but encourage them to call more frequently and even every day if they need it. I try to pay attention to their needs and customize how I work with them. I expect them to go to at least one meeting a week, but I recommend more, and tell them that I go to 3 meetings a week. I go over the tools with them and I suggest they read a daily reader such as For Today or Voices of Recovery. I share why I came to OA and how I work it. I explain that the reason I ask them to do these things is that I do the same things myself. I tell them they need to make a list of other people to call besides me because I travel a lot. We talk about the difference between abstinence (as defined by OA) and a plan of eating as part of working Step 1. We work Steps 1-3 out of the OA Workbook, Steps 4 and 5 out of the Big Book or OA 12x12, and Steps 6-12 out of the workbook and the 12x12. I suggest they start sponsoring after they complete Step 4 & 5.

I am a pretty kind, gentle and accepting sponsor

The first thing I do is arrange a time to get together for about 15 minutes so I can tell them how I sponsor. It's a bonding thing so we can figure out if we are a fit. I prefer sponsoring newcomers, especially if they are "enthusiastic" (desperate), and willing to go to any lengths. I work the steps by having sponsees write on the questions in the OA 12x12 Workbook or I email them questions on each step. I have them write on one question a day, call me every day (including that very day) and read what they wrote. I ask them to make a 15 minute commitment every day. I also suggest they develop a food plan (and possibly consult a nutritionist if needed) and create a plan of action. I share my own action plan which includes reading For Today and Voices of Recovery daily, praying and meditating, and visualizing the next 24 hours. I visualize accepting that things may not go my way and I prepare myself to accept the flow of the day. I encourage them to use the rest of the tools (e.g., meetings, phone calls, etc.) I am a pretty kind, gentle and accepting sponsor. I've never fired anyone, although some have drifted away. I try calling them once or twice and sharing how I, too, left the program, but finally found my way back. I see myself as a coach, a mentor and a "consultant." I'm not there to tell them how to live their lives or work their program. I ask them to apply the principles of each step. For Step 1, I ask them to be honest about what's going on with their food and if there is a problem, to explore what they can do differently tonight. No guilt. No shame. It's just food. It's just fuel. I encourage them to give service and to sponsor others.

The first time I sponsored I did a terrible job.

I have a conversation with them to see where they are at. I ask what foods trigger them and make them want to eat compulsively. I have them draw 3 concentric circles: green/yellow/red and ask them to identify their red light, yellow light and green light foods to get their brain to start to think about a food plan that would work for them. I ask them to read Step 1 in the OA 12x12 and write about how it applies to them. I have them underline passages that jump out at them and I share what I have underlined in my book and what came up for me. I point out things they might have missed. I have them call me daily and go to a meeting every day to get their head on straight, to figure things out and to get lots of phone numbers. I support them to get through the day abstinely. We talk every day and I check in to see how they are doing. I arrange to meet whenever they are done with their writing (about every 1-2 weeks). We work Steps 1, 2 & 3 in the OA 12x12 and then move on to the Doctor's Opinion, There is a Solution, More About Alcoholism and We Agnostics in the Big Book. I ask them what is their current concept of a Higher Power and what would they like it to be. We work Step 4 out of the Big Book and concentrate on Column 4, My Part and Column 5, The Solution: "*How can I do better next time? How can I set this matter straight?*" We cover resentments, fears, shame and sadness. I suggest they do service right away. After working Step 4 & 5 I encourage people to sponsor. If they are afraid to make a mistake, I just tell them about all the mistakes I made. The first time I sponsored I did a terrible job. People ran away from me. But the truth is you can't really harm anyone by making mistakes as a sponsor.

The more program I "eat," the less extra food I need.

When I was a newcomer, I was totally ruled by my disease of compulsive overeating. In order for me to start to recover, I needed to take my "OA medicine" every day so that I was ingesting the "solution" to balance out all my crazy behaviors around food and the crazy thoughts swirling around in my head. And that is why I ask my sponsees to call me every day (Mon-Fri) at times that work for both of us. I have them read OA literature every day, write on it and read their writing to me over the phone. I ask them to read Steps 1, 2 and 3 out loud over the phone, commit to avoiding their binge foods and binge behaviors for just that day, and to ask God to grant them the strength to keep their commitments for the day. I also ask them to share 3 gratitudes. When I am crazy in my disease, I usually overreact to people and challenging situations. Remembering what is going "right" in my life (e.g., gratitudes) helps me to gain balance and perspective. I also assign step questions for sponsees to write on...and I give them my answers to the same questions. That way they can see that we are both the same when it comes to the disease of compulsive eating. I also have them read a Step in the OA 12x12, AA 12x12 or a chapter in the Big Book, highlight and write on it. We sometimes study the Big Book paragraph by paragraph and listen to the corresponding podcast at *A Vision for You* (<https://www.avision4you.info/>), to hear other people's perspectives on the reading. Then every two weeks we get together to go over and discuss their Step writing. I help my new sponsee work through each of the 12 steps and encourage them to use as many of the tools each day as they can (e.g., "eat more program."). It has been my experience that the more program I "eat", the less extra food I need. When they are ready to sponsor, I help them get started and continue to support them as needed.

I ask them what food they are willing to give up for the next 24 hours.

I suggest we first have coffee to see if it's a good fit. I tell them I used to be a very "directive" sponsor because I felt "responsible" for their recovery. Now I'm more "loosey-goosey." I expect them to stay in touch, have a plan of eating, and stay accountable to that plan. My bottom line rules are that they go to meetings and they never lie to me (I don't care what they ate or did; they just have to tell the truth). I used to do daily morning check-in calls, but now emails or texts also work. I suggest some kind of daily contact for accountability.

I tell them I am their sponsor, not their BFF, although we might become friends. My role is to share my experience, strength and hope and to support them in being abstinent and practicing the principles. I like to meet regularly in the beginning (probably once a week) and have closer contact. I tell them to buy a Big Book and an OA 12x12. I work the steps out of the OA 12x12. We read, talk and answer questions. We read the Doctor's Opinion.

I tell them about my history with food and ask them to tell me about themselves. I ask them what food they are willing to give up for the next 24 hours, a food that once they eat it, they can't stop. I tell them it is really useful to "bookend" (text me before and after meals). I share about my own spiritual program; and if they have trouble with the God thing, I ask them to get on their knees every morning and say "God help me," and every evening, "Thank You, God." I tell them that I came to the program with no God. I share the things I did to now call myself a spiritual person. We read *We Agnostics and More About Alcoholism in the Big Book*.

I break Step 1 into two parts: what they are powerless over and how that is making their life unmanageable. I recommend they attend the Saturday morning meeting to better understand the OA program. We work through each step with an emphasis on writing and reading the literature. If I don't have experience with a problem I suggest other people they can call. I share the readings I do every morning and suggest what they may want to start reading as part of their program. I wait to ask them to sponsor until they finish the steps and are abstinent. When they start sponsoring, I support and help them.

I take my sponsees through all twelve steps in two weeks.

If someone asks me to sponsor them, I ask them to call me and we'll talk some more. If they do call me, the first thing I tell them is that I sponsor in a certain way, and I ask for a commitment of a certain amount of time. I ask them if they are willing to take direction. I am a strict sponsor and I take my sponsees through the Big Book. I like to get through the steps quickly. And even though we may experience a shift after working Steps 4 & 5, we will not experience much freedom until we work Step 9. I take my sponsees through all twelve steps in two weeks. If they want/need to go back and do more work on any of the steps, they can.

But our primary goal is to get the obsession removed. And for that, they have to be committed. We do a chapter a day because our disease is so "loud". We've got to have recovery coming through our ears as much as possible. I ask them to email me a timeline of their life as a compulsive overeater in five year increments (0-5; 5-10; 10-15, etc.) What happened with their eating? How did they treat it? I want them to put it on paper because it's a "crime scene" they are looking at. We need to smash any notion that there is any other way to deal with this disease. Then they need to define their "abstinence." What are they going to do? What are their problem foods and their binge foods? I try to keep it simple, because we have a disease that lies. So I have them take a photo of each meal and send it to me. No call-ins. No secrets. It keeps them accountable.

I also have them listen to certain podcasts from *A Vision for You* (<https://www.avision4you.info/>), particularly on the Doctor's Opinion, and take notes. I ask them "What is your spiritual practice?" Right after Step 3, I ask them "What can you do today to nurture your relationship with God?" You can wake up each morning and say "Hello, God." That's always a good start. That way you can make immediate contact. If you're not with God, you're in the disease. And finally, they need to sponsor at least one person, or they will lose what they have.

I never thought I was recovered enough, thin enough, or abstinent enough to be a sponsor.

I was not a successful dieter. I was eating my brains out. I was desperate. I am grateful for my desperation because it gave me the courage to ask someone to sponsor me. She told me to call her an hour earlier than I normally get up. I said "yes." This person gave me 30 questions that took me through the first 3 steps. (I now print this out and email them to my sponsees). We used the AA 12x12 and pamphlets. I was weighing and measuring my food. I wrote my food down and committed my food. I was reading and writing every day. I started losing weight fast. My sponsor wasn't my best friend. She was someone who shared the 12 steps with me. We worked the 4th step out of the Big Book. I completed my 4th step one year later. I do *not* recommend taking that long. I never thought I was recovered enough, thin enough, or abstinent enough to be a sponsor. But I don't ask them to do anything I don't do. I keep in contact with my sponsees. I want them to call me at least 2-3 mornings a week. Sometimes it feels like my sponsees are not doing what I suggest. But that's about my ego. If their food is going crazy, I have them call me. I ask them "Are you willing to text me and say breakfast is over? I can promise you, you won't die before lunch." (I use humor all the time). And I have been fired as a sponsor. One sponsee called me and broke up with me on the phone. I had to do ego work big time, because I took it personally. That person needed something else. It wasn't all about me. Sometimes sponsees won't call you. They break up with you. They find someone else. I think we just bless everyone.

After my sponsees have completed Step 5, I encourage them to sponsor. But the literature says they can sponsor up to the level they have been sponsored. When people say "No. I couldn't possibly." I resent them not passing it on. So now, when I start working with a new sponsee I tell them that, and one of the things that will happen after they work the steps, they will have the *honor* and *privilege* of being a sponsor. I want them to know early. Because that is how we keep abstaining: by giving it away. I feel strongly that we should never say "I can't sponsor you." It is not a good message to a newcomer. We can take the person temporarily or help them find another sponsor. We need to commit to being sponsors and to encouraging sponsees to sponsor. I wouldn't be here if I didn't have a sponsor. One of the things that keeps me going is my sponsees. They "feed" my recovery.

I ask God to help me transcend my own bias in order to help others. And then I go make mistakes.

I don't say yes or no when someone asks me to sponsor them. I suggest we sit down and talk to find out if we can work together. I ask them to tell me about what they were like before they showed up at OA, and what they think they need. What is their story? I tell them my story. I tell them my experience in OA and how I sponsor. I tell them it's okay if they don't think my method of sponsoring would work for them. I share that I had been through 5 sponsors before I stayed. We start out as temporary. We see how it goes. It will either work or not. I pray to keep an open mind about our differences. I pray for acceptance. I ask God to help me transcend my own bias in order to help others. And then I go make mistakes. I tell them I need them to call me and check-in by phone 2-5 times a week. I ask them to go to at least one meeting a week that I go to so we can see each other face to face. And they need to be willing to do writing. We start with Step 1. We read it. We write about it. We talk about it. We share our experiences about it. I also need to know what their disease looks like and to develop a food plan. I suggest they read Dignity of Choice to get some ideas. I don't focus on what they are eating. It's none of my business. I'm more concerned with how they eat and that they are honest about what they are eating. From there they begin to discover what *they* want to stop doing. But there needs to be some kind of structure called "meals". And there needs to be honesty. We start out with the OA 12x12. They read each chapter, and write what they identify with in terms of their behavior, their thinking and their feelings about it. I help guide them through each step and also share my own experience with it. I work Step 4 several ways: using the Big Book columns; using the OA HOW 172 questions; using 4th step worksheets where they check off boxes and answer questions. Once we get through Step 4 and 5, I point out that they now have experience, strength and hope on steps 1 through 4, and they can be of service to someone who has not got it. They often say "I don't know what to do." And I tell them "You have *remarkable* recovery around Steps 1 through 4. You can do what I did: talk to them, discuss your expectations, find out what they are comfortable with; maybe make it temporary; and don't tell them yes or no." One sponsee said "But I'm *only* at the 4th step. I haven't done enough. I'm not good enough." I suggested she re-word it to: "I'm *already* at the 4th step!"

“Take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy power, Thy love...”

That’s about it. When I’m given the gift of a weight-losing abstinence one day at a time and I’ve worked all twelve steps with a sponsor, then I get to pay it forward. Sponsoring helps keep me abstinent, and I’ll do anything for that. I don’t have to know *how* to sponsor, I just have to practice relying on God, whatever God is, to give me the words and show me what to do—the same way I rely on God for my abstinence.

I first meet with a prospective sponsee, telling them we’ll talk to see if we both think “we’re a fit.” Sometimes we’re not, and that’s ok. I tell them my story, and I ask for theirs. If they’re new, I tell them how other sponsors may sponsor differently. If they’re currently in program and stuck or come from another program, I tell them it’s important to keep an open mind and to maybe look toward a different quality in their relationship to HP. I talk about abstinence (explanation following) and food plans, and I explain the basics of how I sponsor (following). If we seem to be fitting, I ask them to think about a question at least overnight and not give me their answer until they’re ready after that: “Are you willing to go to any length? To work the steps?”

Abstinence and food plans. Since the definition of abstinence includes the phrase “working toward a healthy body weight,” we discuss *weight* and losing it and how relying on the steps and HP *allows* us to do that. I suggest weighing only once a month to make sure that the weight is going down and if it’s not, then tweaking one’s food plan first. I think food plans must realistically allow one to lose weight, and I encourage a sponsee to consider making a general plan of categories of foods and all their possible choices, with portions, and to define their time periods of eating and refrain from red-light foods. I carefully explain it’s not necessary to DO the food plan right away, but to have it handy when one IS ready (by Step 3, but I don’t say that).

Basics. For the first 16 to 24 weeks, we meet once a week face-to-face on an agreed-upon specific day and time, and we treat that as a commitment we change only for important reasons. The sponsee does homework each week, up to 3 hours, reading chosen selections from the Big Book or OA 12x12 or AA 12x12 and underlining what leaps out at them. (I don’t use workbooks or hundreds of questions.) When we meet, we talk about their lives in general and then we discuss the homework, going over each paragraph of the reading and sharing our insights. After Step One, I ask the sponsee to also spend a concentrated half hour each day to either think about what HP might be for them or, if they already know that, to connect with It in whatever way works for them. And, daily the sponsee sends me an email detailing five things they are grateful for---and after they have chosen to do their food plan with God’s help, then in the same email they report whether or not they are abstinent that day...which we both understand means they have followed their food plan as defined. I respond with only a sentence or two most of the time. I tell the sponsee to attend at least one OA meeting a week, more if they are in trouble. I ask them to call/text me if they need to. After they’ve worked through all twelve steps this way, we discuss how to proceed. We no longer meet each week unless they feel it necessary, but we work out calling and writing and sharing that is less time-intensive so I can be free to take others through the steps.

Intangibles. Some things I’ve learned the hard way. I *try* to listen more than I talk. I look for and express my view of a sponsee’s pluses and progress. I pray before I meet a sponsee and during our meeting I ask God to tell me what to say/do. I share my experience rather than advising (most of the time, anyway). I work at continually and subtly asking the sponsee to expand their spiritual life, and I use some open-ended questions like: ““When you ask Spirit about that, what do you hear?” “What does Spirit have to say?” When they’ve worked through Step 12, I suggest reading BB pages 86-88 every day and practicing the directions there verbatim. Finally, I remind myself and my sponsees: “It works. It really does.”

The Nuts and Bolts of How I Sponsor

I use a 3-part sponsorship strategy: we set expectations, agree to work the 12 steps together, and implement an action plan. **EXPECTATIONS:** Prior to me agreeing to sponsor, I ask potential sponsees to attend three mtgs/week (minimum); do service; and share their ESH at meetings. We acknowledge whether our expectations match up and whether the sponsee is actually ready to work the steps. As a sponsor, I assure confidentiality, listen but not judge or fix, am objective, honest, patient, and share what works for me but encourage them to find their own path. Abstinence is not a requirement to work the steps with me but I expect them to identify a food plan and their efforts to implement it will be part of our discussions. I sponsor men and women holding firm boundaries with both. **AGREEMENT:** If this agreement no longer works (ie circumstances change, the arrangement is incompatible or the sponsee is no longer working the steps), then we mutually agree to part ways. We are either working the steps or not; I don't let it slide. **ACTION PLAN:** We choose a format (I like the OA 12 x 12 and the green cover OA workbook) and I use the 3-legged stool model (physical, emotional, and spiritual) for our action plan. Diabetes, high BP, heart disease, and orthopedic issues are rampant in OA so I suggest they get a physical health checkup from their MD including lab work if it is not current (using hard data as a baseline acts as a reality check on the fantasy that excess food has no health repercussions). If they need or have a food plan, I suggest it be evaluated by a licensed professional from outside the program. This evaluation is especially important if the person is struggling with abstinence as it acts as a reality check for the sponsee.

If my sponsee is already seeing a mental health therapist or needs one, I suggest they continue with that therapy or help them find an outside professional while they continue to work OA's 12 steps. If they have a Higher Power or need one, I suggest they work to develop and expand that relationship through working the 12 steps or explore other spiritual paths which support their spiritual recovery. I urge them to view the spiritual life in recovery as an ongoing adventure, an exploration rather than a one-and-done item on the to-do list. Prior to each meeting, I ask the sponsee to read the AA and OA literature applicable to the step we are working on, reflect on the reading, and write down their answers to the questions for that step (we set written completion dates for each step). In other words, there is lots of reading and writing homework. At our meetings (face-to-face or phone), I do a brief check-in, the sponsee then reads their writing; we discuss and share, and move on to the next step. ***It is during this time of thoughtful conversation, in sharing ideas and feelings, in exposing our vulnerability, in revealing our personal histories of how excess food affected every area of our lives that real healing occurs.***

It usually takes 6-9 months to thoroughly work the 12 steps with one person. I often have two sponsees going at the same time, one beginning the steps and one finishing the steps. I encourage my sponsees to begin sponsoring as soon as possible. Usually by the time they have completed Step 9, they are fully abstinent and well on the road to recovery. I have worked with sponsees who began sponsoring and became fully abstinent even though they may not be fully abstinent when they begin to sponsor. After formally completing the steps, our sponsor/sponsee relationship often takes the form of working the steps around specific issues.

RELAPSE: If my sponsee is in relapse, I don't abandon them unless they refuse to continue to work the steps with me. It takes courage and honesty for sponsees to acknowledge that they have again returned to food. I am gentle and do a lot of listening. Haranguing someone because they can't abstain is like emotionally beating them. It's better to acknowledge the need for them to reach their bottom, to remind them that food is still doing something for them which is why they can't put it down. The way to identify that "something" is to continue working the steps to get to the core reasons for that continued behavior. I remind them of the many days they are abstinent and suggest they focus on one 24-hr period only. Abstinence is a learned behavior coupled with a reliance on HP to remove the compulsion. My OA friend and I agree that back-to-back abstinence happens over time, not overnight.

LESSONS LEARNED: Sponsoring is about guiding someone to find their own path vs coercing them to do it my way. Sponsorship is psychologically and emotionally satisfying; it makes me feel worthy, that I have a place on this earth where I fit in, that I am needed, and that I can and do make a difference in another member's life. Sponsorship has helped me become more compassionate and patient; the people I sponsor are my teachers; I am very grateful for the lessons they teach me.

Books and Pamphlets

<http://bookstore.aa.org/>

A Guide For Sponsors. *Why, When and How to Be an OA Sponsor*

Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous

The Twelve Step Workbook of Overeaters Anonymous

Questions to write on for each of the 12 steps

Where Do I Start? *Everything A Newcomer Needs to Know*

Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide – Overeaters Anonymous

Can be used by individuals and by sponsors as well as workshops.

Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book) (references to working with others)

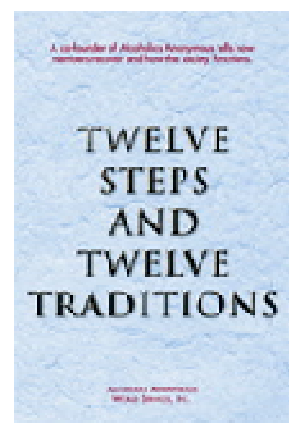
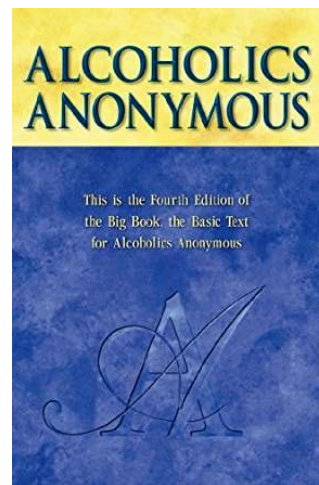
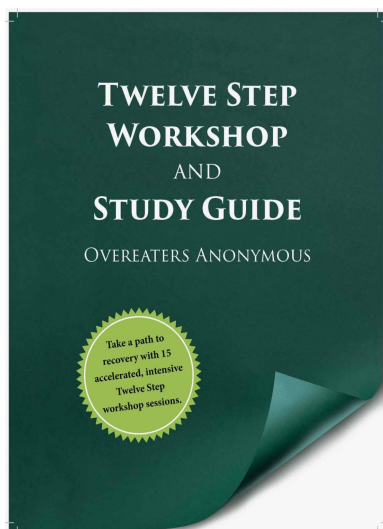
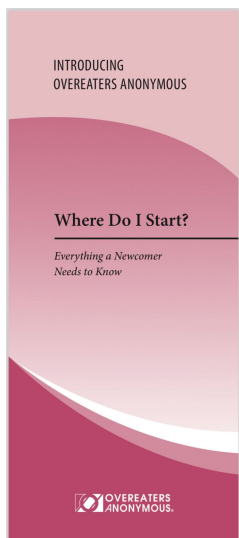
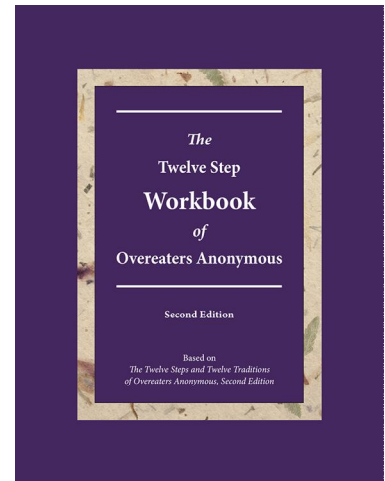
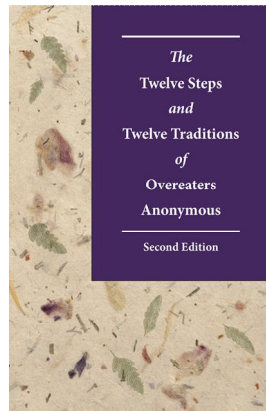
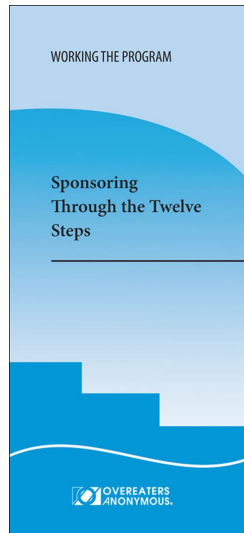
pp. 15-16; 69-70; 86

Chapter 7: Working With Others (pp 63, 89-103)

Chapter 11: A Vision for You (pp 151-164; 239, 245, 282, 292, 334, 343, 355, 363, 472, 494, 660, 559)

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions – Alcoholics Anonymous (references to working with others)

pp 23-24, 36-37, 112-114, 155, 177



E N D N O T E S

Additional Sources

The primary sources for this handbook came from the experience, strength and hope of local Sacramento Valley OA sponsors. Other sources are listed below.

- 1** Tips on Sponsoring (Sections (A) – (D)
Westchester United Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous
<http://cjoa.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A-Sponsor%E2%80%99s-Toolbox-%E2%80%93-Getting-a-Newcomer-Started-and-Through-Steps-1-3.pdf>

 - 2** Finding Your Trigger Foods
Northern Virginia Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous (NoVA) workshop
<http://oanova.org/Newsletter/finding-your-food-triggers.html>

 - 3** OA in Action Sponsor Guidelines
OA in Action - Minnesota
<https://oainaction.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/oaia-sponsor-guidelines.pdf>

 - 4** Big Book Sponsorship
Developed by recovered addicts, based on the AA Big Book
<https://bigbooksponsorship.org/downloads/4-hour-12-steps.pdf>

 - 5** Questions and Answers on Sponsorship
AA General Service Conference-Approved literature
https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/p-15_Q&AonSpon.pdf

 - 6** OA Lifeline: Having a Sponsor and Being A Sponsor
OA Lifeline Magazine – March 2015
https://oa.org/files/files1/pdf/lifeline_mar15.pdf
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