

Battling an Addiction

How Twelve Step Programs Can Help



If you are struggling to overcome a problem with alcohol or another drug, a twelve step self-help program such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) may provide the support you need, especially during some of your most difficult days.

There are many ways to recover from an addiction to alcohol, narcotic pain medication, cocaine, marijuana, or another drug. Research suggests that a combined intervention that includes specialized substance abuse counseling, medical management, self-help group participation, and medication is likely to provide the strongest support for those trying to kick their substance habit.

Recent studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of AA suggest that rates of abstinence from alcohol are about twice as high among those who attend AA. Those who are new to

recovery or trying to re-establish abstinence from alcohol are often encouraged by treatment providers as well as those who attend AA meetings to go to “90 meetings in 90 days.” Social scientists acknowledge that behavior change requires a sustained effort over time, so attending a meeting each day over a long period of time can be expected to facilitate behavior change. Researchers admit that it is difficult to determine whether AA is the reason attendees are more successful in giving up drinking or whether other influences, such as higher levels of motivation, are the key factors that lead to higher abstinence rates for those attending AA meetings.

AA is a specific type of self-help program: Its guiding principles include a twelve step process that attendees are encouraged to follow in order to achieve abstinence from alcohol and

live alcohol-free. AA is the first and most widely-recognized twelve step program. AA was founded in the 1930's by two men---a physician and a stock broker---who were trying to quit drinking themselves. Together, they formed a self-help group based on a twelve step process they established. Anyone with a desire to stop drinking can attend AA. There is no cost, there are no professional counselors, and attendees are asked to keep other attendees' identities confidential. AA members share their experiences with each other. New members are encouraged to connect to an AA member who will function as a sponsor, providing one-on-one guidance and recovery support. Some communities have formed specialized AA groups such as beginners groups, old timers groups, speakers groups, or dual-identity groups for gay, lesbian, and transgender people.

The first of the twelve AA steps invite those who attend meetings to accept that they are powerless over alcohol and that their lives have become unmanageable. AA members often identify themselves along with an acknowledgement of their powerlessness: "Hi, I'm (first name only) and I'm an alcoholic."

The second and third AA steps introduce the spiritual role that a Higher Power plays in helping members recover. Subsequent steps invite members to inventory their shortcomings, make amends, and use prayer and meditation to enhance their spirituality.

AA's "Big Book" is a print reference that outlines each of the twelve steps and provides personal stories as well as other information for those who are exploring AA for themselves or for a loved one. For those who struggle with the spiritual component of AA, secular self-help programs may be another option.

The principles of AA have been used to form many other fellowships specifically designed for those recovering from other addictions or mental health struggles. Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is open to people who are trying to stop using drugs other than alcohol. Al-Anon and Nar-Anon are groups available for friends and family members of people struggling with alcohol and drug addictions. Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) addresses compulsions related to relationships, referred to as codependency. More recently, twelve step programs focused on non-substance issues have proliferated. Clutterers Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous and Sex Addicts Anonymous are just a few of the many groups available.

Remember that substance abuse problems are treatable and help is available. Twelve step programs are one of the many resources available to those who are ready to face their struggles and make positive changes.

You can locate an Alcoholics Anonymous group or other twelve step self-help programs in your community by contacting Carebridge. AA meetings can also be found using the meeting locator available at www.aa.org.

Contact Carebridge at **800.437.0911** or visit **www.myliferesource.com** for more information