

## Discover the Benefits of Having an AA Sponsor

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has been helping individuals with alcohol addiction or alcohol use disorder (AUD) since 1935. AA is a 12-step program and support group that helps alcoholics get and stay sober over time by using a "one day at a time" approach to sobriety. One of the core benefits of AA is help from an AA sponsor, who acts as a guide through the 12 steps of recovery.

**What is a sponsor?** A sponsor is an AA member with some prescribed period of sobriety who serves as a guide and mentor for people attempting to work through the 12 steps to establish abstinence and long-term recovery. A sponsor can serve as a sounding board and a reality check while learning to deal with "life on life's terms." A sponsor understands the struggles with early recovery because they have been there. Although the methods and style of sponsors vary across groups, sponsorship lines, and individuals, a sponsor is a support person and an advanced student in working the 12 steps. The sponsor is not a licensed therapist but rather someone who has experienced similar struggles that can provide encouragement, support, and guidance when navigating the path to becoming alcohol-free.

**How Do You Get a Sponsor?** Having a sponsor is not necessary to be a member of AA, but most AA groups encourage newcomers to get a sponsor. To find a sponsor, the new member should let the group know they want one. They can do this during group meetings or ask a particular person to be their sponsor. When choosing a sponsor, it is best to approach someone with lengthy sobriety, actively working the steps, is willing to sponsor, and is more focused on the solution than the problem. While this person should have values, beliefs, and a compatible personality, the sponsor must be available. If the chosen sponsor is

unavailable, they or the AA group can help identify other potential sponsors. Don't take it personally if you ask someone to be your sponsor, and they decline. They have refused for their reasons, not because you are unworthy.

**What Does a Sponsor Do?** There is variation in how sponsors guide in working through the steps. Some sponsors are more empathetic and nurturing. Others are more directive and straightforward with their tutoring and support. Most are somewhere in the middle. Whatever style they have, sponsors should be willing to share their "experience, strength, and hope." They explain the AA program and guide sponsees through the steps. They serve as a source of encouragement, motivation, and accountability. They often help the new member understand cues, triggers, and cravings and teach them how to withstand urges to drink. They encourage meeting attendance, serve as a role model, and show by example that it's possible to overcome addiction and that a fulfilling life without alcohol is possible. They are not a lending institution, a chauffeur, or a counselor, but they might help arrange transportation to meetings or offer advice on skill development. Sponsors are not judgmental or critical and do not impose their beliefs on others. They respect individuals' views and work within the AA program's guiding principles, which do not include telling newcomers what to believe about a higher power.

AA sponsorship is an invaluable resource for people struggling with alcohol addiction. A sponsor is a person who is committed to helping the newcomer achieve sobriety and live a healthier, happier life. The sponsor's role is to provide guidance and support in navigating the AA program's 12 steps. By sharing their "experience, strength, and hope," the sponsor helps those trying to establish and maintain sobriety.

Are you struggling with addiction and worried about relapse? Our ebook, *Understanding Cross Addiction To Prevent Relapse*, can help you understand the nature of addiction and cross-addiction, and give you the tools to prevent relapse.

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