

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR BEGINNERS MEETINGS

1 — How to Stay Away From One Drink One Day at a Time

(In any series of beginners meetings there are usually new faces at each session. Therefore, leaders have found that this topic should always be included in every meeting.)

When we first came to A.A., many of us did not realize that the first drink triggered the compulsion to drink more and more; that it deluded us into thinking we could drink another safely, then another and another.

The danger seems obvious now, but many of today's newcomers are just as baffled as we once were. So the leader usually explains the significance of the first drink — and how to avoid just that one, for at least one day or one hour.

Almost every A.A. has a favorite means of doing this, and other members attending a meeting can make suggestions for additions to the following:

1. The twenty-four hour (or one-minute, if necessary) plan.
2. The halt reminder — never getting too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.
3. Sticking close to your sponsor and discussing personal problems with him or her.
4. Postponing the drink.
5. Going to lots of A.A. meetings.
6. Keeping pockets stuffed with A.A. reading matter.- 3
7. Prayer — in whatever form the new member prefers it.
8. Changing routines — especially at drinking hours — to break up the old habit patterns.
9. Spending time with other members individually — either in person or on the telephone (and especially during old drinking hours).
10. Spending time in meeting rooms or central offices where A.A.s gather outside of regular meeting hours.
11. Starting work on the Twelve Steps, to fight such threats to sobriety as resentments, self pity, and the tendency to dwell on the past or the future.

2 — Alcoholism, the Disease

Information on successful Twelfth Step work can be found throughout the book Alcoholics Anonymous. Also check A.A. Comes of Age.

Alcoholics usually have to face the medical facts of the disease, as well as the present unmanageability of their own lives, before they can accept help. This seems to be true even for newcomers who are forced by pressure from others to come to A.A. for the first time.

The medical viewpoint on alcoholism that helped to bring about the birth of A.A. is outlined in the chapter "The Doctor's Opinion" in Alcoholics Anonymous. It is explained in further detail in

the first three chapters of the Big Book and in the booklet Living Sober (chapter 4).

Many good descriptions of the disease are used by A.A. members, such as: “threefold illness,” “progressive disease,” “compulsion plus obsession,” etc. (See the pamphlet “Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.,” included in this packet.)

Many newcomers have also been helped by discussion of various definitions of alcoholism, of the symptoms of the disease, of the uselessness of misdirected willpower in combating alcoholism, of the futility in insisting on an intellectual understanding of the condition before becoming willing to practice the A.A. program.

#3 — How It Works:

The Twelve Steps Suggested as a Program of Recover. Many of us wonder when we first approach A.A. just how it works.

That’s the title of Chapter V in Alcoholics Anonymous, of course. It is the heart of the A.A. message and is enclosed in this packet.

Because the newcomer may have been told that “there are no musts in A.A.,” it seems wise to explain that these suggested Steps are a summary of actual past experience in recovery.

The men and women responsible for the Steps realized that they could never reach in person many alcoholics who wanted their help. So they knew they had to be especially careful to use the words that would describe most honestly and completely the road they had taken.

Leaders of beginners meetings generally agree that newcomers are rarely helped by ponderous sermonizing about the Twelve Steps, or by complicated interpretations. The Steps speak plainly for themselves, and all newcomers are, of course, free to interpret and use them as they individually choose.

It is the leader’s job to be sure that their exact wording is made available to the newcomer. While newcomers may not be in the mood for serious reading, the sooner they can read Alcoholics Anonymous the better. Some groups give it away, others sell it, many keep a “lending library” of A.A. books; some award the Big Book or Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as a “door prize.”

4 — The Twelve Traditions:

What We Learn from A A. Mistakes

The Traditions explain much of the seemingly contradictory behavior that confuses newcomers when they first encounter a fellowship that functions with so little obvious organization:

“anonymity” — and yet the occasional use of full names at meetings; “no dues or fees” — and then the basket is passed.

A discussion of the origin of the Traditions, in relation to our earlier mistakes, can answer many questions and allay many anxieties for newcomers.

By relating their own experiences in using the Traditions, leaders can help newcomers understand the importance of principles before personalities, of anonymity at the public, print, broadcast or social media level, of the group conscience, self-support, and A.A.’s nonaffiliation with other organizations.

Knowing what A.A. does not do is as important for many of us as knowing what it does do, so that we will not expect more than A.A. can deliver. A list of services A.A. does not provide is given in the pamphlet “A.A. in Your Community,” included in this packet. - 5

If leaders want to feel secure in their own understanding of the Traditions, it is recommended that they study carefully Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and A.A. Comes of Age, plus the pamphlet “The Twelve Traditions Illustrated.”

5 — A.A. in Print — Service to Others

Most A.A.s agree that newcomers are entitled to know about all the A.A. help available to them. This includes A.A. literature published by A.A. World Services, Inc., which offers a large range of various kinds of A.A. help. It carefully reflects the broadest possible consensus of the entire movement, worldwide — not just some individual’s personal interpretation or some unique local view.

Pointing out what these publications are, and what they contain, may be one of the finest services we can give to newcomers, because we are thereby encouraging them to dig out the answers for themselves.

Another gift of knowledge we can pass on to newcomers is information about our Third Legacy of Service, helping them to understand their own role as new links in our worldwide chain of love and service.

It is easy to explain just how A.A. is geared to serve alcoholics after reading about it in the enclosed pamphlet “The A.A. Group.” In addition, information about the general service structure appears in brief form in the pamphlet “Inside A.A.”

6 — Other Factors in A.A. Recovery

In addition to the five suggestions above, many groups report that their beginners meetings include discussions of these topics:

- a) The original A.A. experience, as described in Alcoholics Anonymous and A.A. Comes of Age.
- b) The desire to be sober for oneself.
- c) Release from the compulsion and removal of the obsession.
- d) Who can be a member of A.A. and how to join. Many newcomers are greatly relieved at the absence of any official ritual, "signing up," or other procedure for becoming an A.A. member. Anyone may attend open A.A. meetings. Membership in A.A. is open to anyone with a drinking problem. Dually-addicted people are also eligible for A.A. membership, if they have a drinking problem.- 6
- e) Acceptance of facts about ourselves; self-honesty as the basis of the program.
- f) The Serenity Prayer.
- g) The A.A. Slogans.
- h) Sponsorship; how to get a sponsor, how to change sponsors, if necessary. (See the enclosed pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.")
- i) The family (see Chapters 8 and 9, "To Wives" and "The Family Afterward," in Alcoholics Anonymous) and ways in which nonalcoholic relatives can get guidance in understanding alcoholism and thus helping the alcoholic (the Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen).
- j) The A.A. language. Most leaders of beginners meetings agree that it is very important to explain any specialized A.A. jargon to newcomers. Indeed, it is essential to make all discussions at these meetings as simple and understandable as we can. Many newcomers arrive with no prior knowledge of A.A., and (as most of us recall from our own histories) few newcomers are mentally in the best shape for rapidly absorbing complex information or ideas.
- k) Spiritual awakening. Ever since Ebby T. first successfully twelfth-stepped Bill W., A.A.s have been encouraged to arrive at their own conception of A.A. recovery tools. For a discussion of the role of a spiritual awakening in recovery, see in Alcoholics Anonymous the chapters "We Agnostics," "Working with Others," "A Vision for You," and "Spiritual Experience." Also refer to Step Twelve in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and in A.A. Comes of Age; plus the pamphlets "Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.," "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship," and "Many Paths to Spirituality."

This is A.A. General Service
Conference-approved literature.
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