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SPONSORSHIP: A Return from Isolation

Sex and Love Addicts
Anonymous



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Sponsorship: A Return from Isolation

Sponsorship is among the most important tools for continued recovery in S.L.A.A., along with regular attendance at meetings and working the Twelve Steps. Sponsorship offers us a powerful tool for gaining clarity about our addiction. We find support and guidance in dealing with our addictive patterns, and begin to realize new options for living in recovery. As we grow in sobriety, a sponsor/sponsee relationship is an alternative to the crippling self-involvement that is one of the bitter fruits of our addiction. You may be new to S.L.A.A., or perhaps you have been around for several years. Whatever your hesitations may be regarding sponsorship, we want to assure you that you are not alone. Others of us have walked this path as well. Our journeys have led us to reap tremendous rewards from having a sponsor relationship. The following pages may be especially helpful if:

- you would like to gain an understanding of sponsorship
- you are interested in choosing a sponsor
- you are considering becoming a sponsor yourself
- you are having difficulty in an established sponsor relationship
- you have hit a stumbling block in your recovery

What is a Sponsor?

A sponsor is a person who gives us individual support and guidance in applying the S.L.A.A. Twelve Step program of recovery to our lives. A sponsor is neither a parent, a therapist nor a confessor. Accordingly, a sponsor is a person with whom we have no ulterior motive, whom we do not pay and from whom we seek neither absolution nor judgment. Our sponsor is, in fact, a fellow addict. As such, a sponsor does not counsel from a pretense of higher moral ground. Sponsors are not “perfect” people working “perfect” programs. Sponsors are human too, with struggles and confusion just as anyone else in the Fellowship. Indeed, seeing the



imperfections in our sponsors helps relieve us of our own compulsion to be perfect.

The Beginning of the Sponsor / Sponsee Relationship

Recovery rarely is accomplished in isolation. When we incorporate the experience of others into our lives, we begin to experience a broader view of life and recovery. With our S.L.A.A. sponsor, we learn to become honest and open, asking for love, support and guidance in our lives. Through the patience and understanding of our sponsor, our fears of condemnation and shame slowly fade. Gradually we become more able to be vulnerable and open with our sponsor. This increase in trust allows us to more fully benefit from another's help. From the attention and acceptance we receive, we begin to fold that acceptance into our inner selves, which promotes our healing.

With our sponsor, we begin to address recurring problems. Our sponsor helps guide us through the rough passages many of us experience as a result of letting go of our addiction. We explore options which had previously not occurred to us. A sponsor shares his or her own experience and feelings from having been in situations similar to ours, taking care not to give advice. By listening, a sponsor supports the sponsee without trying to "fix," and offers understanding without judgment.

How is a Sponsor Selected?

A sponsor ideally has solid abstinence from his/her addictive patterns and is willing to guide the sponsee through the Twelve Steps. We look for someone who has found sobriety, freedom and/or joy through the Twelve Steps and who understands the process of S.L.A.A. recovery. Perhaps his/her qualities or character assets seem to complement our current phase of spiritual growth. A prospective sponsor's time in the program, i.e., months or years, is only one of the criteria that can be used to select a sponsor. We attend a variety of meetings in order to identify certain individuals in the Fellowship whom we



come to know and respect. Criteria that some of us have used to select a sponsor include:

- Will this person be honest with me and point out my areas of denial?
- Can I trust him/her with my secrets?
- Am I comfortable with this person?
- Does he/she listen attentively to me?
- Can this person discuss his/her own experience rather than give advice?
- Is he/she willing to work with my “bottom-line” issues?
- Does he/she also have a sponsor?
- Does this person’s level of spirituality complement mine?
- How is this person working the Steps?
- How much time can he/she give me on the phone?
In person?
- Do our schedules fit in well?

Ideally, the prospective sponsor has a sponsor of his/her own. As in much of the recovery process, identification with others is paramount. A sponsor who has been sponsored him/herself will be more likely to relate to us. We are reassured when the person we choose for guidance is seeking guidance as well.

A sponsor should be a person we are not in danger of acting out with, or are likely to find intrigue with. A potential sexual partner as sponsor would interfere with the primary purpose of the sponsor relationship, which is recovery through the program of S.L.A.A. Sometimes this means that the sponsor and sponsee should be of the same sex; sometimes of the opposite sex. Discretion, common sense and our Higher Power can guide us in our selection process.

Once we have obtained a sponsor, we commit ourselves to maintaining regular contact with that person. The frequency of contact is determined jointly by the sponsor and the sponsee— as we each become familiar with our individual needs and boundaries.

Sometimes a person we ask to be our sponsor declines. Although disappointed, we need to



remember that this is not a personal rejection. Rather, this person may simply be unavailable to us at this time for any number of reasons. Our Higher Power is taking an active role in forming this relationship, and requires only that we continue to pray for guidance, “do the footwork” and ask another.

What does a Sponsor Gain from Sponsorship?

As we begin to apply the spiritual principles of the program in our own lives, we may yearn to anchor our program in service to others. Sponsorship is a powerful way to assist others in their recovery while strengthening our own. When others look to us for guidance, we discover in ourselves a capacity for humility, as we allow the words of our Higher Power to flow through us. The experience of sponsorship, as with many spiritual experiences, does not leave us unaffected. Our own determination to work the S.L.A.A. program often grows stronger as we see the effects of sex and love addiction in the lives of others. We often see our own recovery in a new light. We acknowledge our own progress and healing and become willing to give back to the program some of the benefits we have gained.

We may also find in ourselves a tremendous fear of commitment and responsibility in considering becoming a sponsor. Our experience has shown that the very act of taking on one or more sponsees is in itself an empowering way to ultimately overcome these fears. With faith in our Higher Power, we can sponsor someone who is just now treading new spiritual ground. Perhaps the sponsee is experiencing a withdrawal similar to what we experienced weeks or months before. The visible progress we see in our new sponsee helps us recognize how very powerful the program has been in our own lives. By carrying the message of recovery in S.L.A.A., we truly become an integral part of the Twelve Step process.

Difficult as sponsorship may seem early on, we eventually become convinced that our experience of sex and love addiction can indeed benefit others. The shame and isolation of our past becomes



an invaluable tool that helps others to identify with us and to join us on a path of recovery. We see ourselves mirrored in those we sponsor. By accepting our sponsees with all their faults and addictions, we return to the human family.

Alternative Sponsor Relationships

We sometimes feel that one person cannot meet all our sponsorship needs all the time. There are no “rules” regarding working with sponsors in our recovery. There are many types of sponsor relationships in this Fellowship. A few of these alternatives are described below.

Temporary Sponsors

Temporary Sponsors are people who are willing to work with others for a short time. Temporary sponsorship is often a good solution for newcomers to the program, or people away from their “home” group for a length of time. This arrangement allows prospective sponsees to become actively involved in the program while looking for a sponsor who would be suitable for a longer period. In addition, first-time sponsors may elect to begin service by a short-term commitment. Some S.L.A.A. groups request a show of hands, while others provide a list of those willing to serve as temporary sponsors.

Multiple Sponsorship

Sometimes we find that a given sponsor simply does not meet all of the needs of our recovery. Perhaps our addictive patterns are shared only in part by one sponsor. We may feel the need to have multiple sponsors who are well-versed in one or more aspects of these patterns. Or, our primary sponsor may have a limited amount of time or resources available. In general, there is no limit to the number of sponsors we can have.

However, some members may be tempted to cultivate multiple sponsors as a way to maintain “compartmentalization,” or not being vulnerable to at least one human being knowing all of us. Manipulative behaviors such as secrecy or half-truths may surface during multiple sponsorships. Our recovery



is enhanced when we can be completely honest with another person at all times.

Co-Sponsorship

Another alternative is co-sponsorship, or mutual sponsorship. In this arrangement, two people agree to work together in a sponsor relationship, each one lending guidance and experience to the other. This alternative is especially useful when people with long-term recovery are not available, or for two people who are both in long-term recovery.

Long-Distance Sponsorship

For people in S.L.A.A. who have no group nearby to attend or who find themselves often far from home, a long-distance sponsor relationship can be a life-saving tool in recovery. Meanwhile, contacting a local Intergroup for assistance in finding a sponsor in your area can often result in a more workable sponsor relationship.

Obstacles in Sponsorship

Am I willing to accept a sponsor?

One of the most common obstacles to accepting a sponsor is our unwillingness to break out of isolation. In our independence and willfulness, we often believe that we must resolve all of our own problems. We might be tempted to “work our own recovery” without a sponsor. However, we may lack enough detachment from our own addiction to be able to see or think clearly about it.

In our seeming independence, many of us feel unable to identify with others. Perhaps we think that our particular addiction is so uniquely bad that no one would want to sponsor us. If we have not yet heard others discuss our own specific bottom-line behavior, we may not have given the program enough time to address our needs. Eventually, we will identify with someone who has shared similar feelings and has overcome similar addictive behaviors.

Such isolation may also come from feeling “above it all.” We find imperfections in every possible sponsor. Fault-finding occurs in both newcomers and in



“old-timers.” After working the program for some time, we may think no one is qualified to sponsor us. Others may lack our length or quality of sobriety, or our intellectual competence. Eventually, we come to realize that we are missing an integral part of the program. It is never too late to ask someone to “be there” for us. We have much to gain from opening up to another person, even one with less time in the program.

Sometimes we impose isolation on ourselves due to our inability to give up familiar behavior patterns. We fear a sponsor may force us to confront our own denial. Without our comfortable addictive ways of coping, we fear the prospect of sober intimacy. The gentle perspective of another S.L.A.A. member may help us to find relief from our obsessive and often unproductive thinking.

Many of us have struggled with similar resistance to accepting a sponsor. Taking stock of our progress on the Twelve Steps, we identify the greatest challenges in our lives here and now. With our Higher Power and a little searching, we find S.L.A.A. members capable of meeting our needs.

Dysfunctional sponsor relationships

For many of us, our addiction is a disease of relationships. Old behavior patterns may surface even in a sponsor relationship. Sometimes our sponsor relationships can mimic dysfunctional or approval-seeking relationships with a parent or other family member. Questions about dependency, intrigue and abuse need to be considered when problems arise in a sponsor relationship. Sometimes even a sponsor relationship can insidiously take on tones of sexual or emotional intrigue. It is the responsibility of each party to be sensitive to these issues and to be mindful of the original objectives of the relationship.

To renew or terminate?

From time to time the sponsor relationship may need to be refreshed and a new sponsorship agreement communicated. If the relationship does not seem to be assisting with recovery, it can be ended by either person. In communicating about



terminating, both parties gain practice ending relationships in a sober manner.

What if I Make a Mistake?

Entrusting the relationship to a Power greater than ourselves

We have seen that recovery from sex and love addiction is a gift from our Higher Power, and sponsorship is a method by which our Higher Power bestows that gift. Our footwork in this aspect of our recovery is our willingness to utilize the gift of sponsorship. If we accept that we are powerless over all relationships and that only God can bless them, then we may also accept that our sponsor relationship is in the hands of this Higher Power as well.

May your Higher Power bless you with a very special sponsor relationship.

Quotes from S.L.A.A. Members on Sponsorship

With my sponsor accepting me wherever I am, whatever I am, I learn to accept myself. If I accept myself, what others think of me doesn't enter my mind.

I like to call my sponsor when good things happen, not just in crises.

I don't want my sponsor to fix me. I don't expect my sponsor to make anything better. I do expect someone to listen, who understands and doesn't judge me. Just by her listening and understanding, I get to have other options come up — by her listening, I get to think of my own answer, and options. I'm not thrown into a position of defending how I feel, so I can move on to more productive things, like solutions to my problems. Just being OK to just feel what I feel. Her love and understanding lets me feel that I'm OK right where I am as a sex and love addict.



In our disease, we have often tried to look good in someone else's eyes. In recovery, with a sponsor, we learn that it's none of our business what someone else thinks of us.

I sometimes give suggestions to my sponsees, but then readily detach from the outcome; that it not be a condition of the relationship. Sponsoring is not about controlling another person's actions.

The willingness has to be there on the part of those I sponsor, otherwise I am just a sounding board for endless daily trials/analyses and my feedback falls on deaf ears.

I need someone I can be the weak one with—all my life I've taken care of others; having a sponsor frees me from always having to be the strong one.

A sponsor is someone I can recognize as a peer in some way.

There's a thin line between control and speaking the truth.

Trust: do I trust myself enough to trust you?

God takes care of what my sponsee hears from me. Sometimes the addiction changes what he/she hears, too.

Working with newcomers keeps me in recovery

I ask my sponsees to keep a list of five other S.L.A.A. phone numbers they can call in the event I'm not available.

So often, my sponsee and I are going through the same things at the same time - I get to say things I need to hear.

The pain my sponsees feel reminds me of my own humility — how far God has brought me.



I put off getting a sponsor for months, because I felt so worthless inside.

If I call a sponsee to check up on him/her, it furthers my codependency.

Boundaries need to be clearly stated: what I will accept, what I won't accept.

When I see how easy it is to sponsor other people, I find it easier to be sponsored by my sponsor.

I don't sponsor someone I want to rescue or marry.

My Higher Power speaks through my sponsor, although my sponsor is not my Higher Power.

Generosity in sponsoring others brings great rewards in our recovery. We always harvest more than we sow.

Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.*

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when



we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's 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 sex and love addicts and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

Twelve Traditions of S.L.A.A.*

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon S.L.A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as this Power may be expressed through our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. Any two or more persons gathered together for mutual aid in recovering from sex and love addiction may call themselves an S.L.A.A. group, provided that as a group they have no other affiliation.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.L.A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to



carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers.

6. An S.L.A.A. group or S.L.A.A. as a whole ought never endorse, finance, or lend the S.L.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 S.L.A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. S.L.A.A. should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. S.L.A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues; hence the S.L.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, TV, film, and other public media. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all fellow S.L.A.A. members.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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 its 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 and prestige divert us from our primary purpose. 7. Every A.A. group ought 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.



Notes



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Available from:

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San Antonio, TX 78209 U.S.A.

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