

# GETTING CLEAN: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

## The New Members Guide to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous

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Right Foot Forward group of Narcotics Anonymous

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Home Group Approved

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Dear Fellow Addicts:

This is an update to the original *Living Clean*, third version, written by addicts in 1983. The original book was never voted on by the Home Groups of NA in the 80s.

Addicts have gotten together and updated this book by removing many of the specific drug reference, editing, and adding additional sections (including the Traditions section written by Greg Pierce!). We humbly submit the updated version for your review and input. The original name *Living Clean* has also been changed to *Getting Clean* to avoid confusing with the different NAWS book with the same name *Living Clean* published in 2012. The original book was always subtitled *The New Members Guide to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous* and that subtitle name remains. The name *Getting Clean* also seems more appropriated to the content. *Getting Clean, The Journey Begins. The New Members Guide to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.*

The Right Foot Forward group has approved this DRAFT version for their Home Group's use. We are inviting your Group's to send us any corrections or comments. We have found when editing the material, a group effort seemed to be the most effective process.

Please help us get this DRAFT to every interested Home Group in the world. If you know a Home Group that did not receive a copy of the *Getting Clean*, please give, email, or print them a copy.

We invite all NA Group to participate in the review process. Please send your feedback &/or completed Review Input Form to the following email address: [GettingClean@protonmail.com](mailto:GettingClean@protonmail.com)

Let your Higher Power be your guide. We remain your trusted servants. Please return your feedback by September 30, 2023

In gratitude and loving service,

*Your Fellow Addicts*

Thank you to the addicts in the Philadelphia Area and Mountain Area of East Tennessee, and those scattered through the world; including but not limited to Amy H., Bill A., Dale Spencer (RIP), Edith T., Greg Pierce (RIP), Greg V., Mike P., and Steve Richards (RIP).

*"God, as we endeavor to complete this work, we know that You are with us. We know that without Your strength and inspiration we are not capable of the task before us. We know that this work is not our work, but Yours. Each of us, in our own way, humbly petition You to use us as Your tools; according to Your will. We offer ourselves to You in this way knowing that You are a Loving God and have all power. In this work and in our lives—Thy will be done."*

– February 1981, The First Draft of the Basic Text (The Grey Form).

### REVIEW INPUT FORM

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Home Group Name

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Trusted Servant

Please review the material carefully, then check either 1, or 2, below:

1. \_\_\_\_ We find the material complete and satisfactory in its present form.
2. \_\_\_\_ In order that our book be complete and satisfactory we recommend the following corrections.

If you have checked number 2, please list the corrections you would make. Be sure to include sentence number and page number for reference purposes. Please list these corrections in the space below and use additional pages if necessary.

Page #	Line #	Comments

# Table of Contents

Introduction: How to use this book.....	1
Are you an addict? .....	3
What are your chances? .....	8
Do I need a rehabilitation center? .....	10
What is Narcotics Anonymous? .....	11
Meetings .....	13
Complete Abstinence.....	19
People, places and things: The Game .....	21
Giving up roles: the toughest-kid on the block .....	26
Taking care of yourself .....	28
One day at a time .....	29
What to do about the craving .....	31
Medical Marijuana.....	34
Sponsorship.....	36
Prayer: It's a spiritual program .....	41
Doing everything overnight. ....	45
Medication Assisted Treatment.....	48
Being assertive .....	50
Alcohol vs. addiction .....	52
I'll never sleep again .....	54
Drugs, doctors, and pain.....	56
Telephone therapy.....	61
Getting active.....	62
Loneliness.....	67
Pornography .....	71
Dry highs and using dreams .....	73
Sex and relationships .....	75
HOW .....	82
Anger and resentments .....	85
Self-pity.....	89
Other addictions: work, gambling, compulsive sex .....	91
Getting into therapy .....	95
Diet and exercise .....	97
Changes .....	99
Social Media .....	101
Getting into the Steps .....	104
Exploring the Traditions .....	111

## 1    **Introduction: How to use this book**

2    This book is intended primarily for the newcomer in the fellowship of Narcotics  
3    Anonymous, although we hope that the information in it will be useful to all of our  
4    members.

5    Our drug using was the center of our lives. Around our drug use there developed a  
6    system of attitudes, of a way of dealing or not dealing with our environment, that take  
7    us years of staying clean to sort out. To recover, we had to change and to learn to  
8    differentiate between recovery-oriented and drug-oriented behavior. Without relying  
9    heavily on the experiences of those in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous who  
10    have traveled the path of recovery, we feel it is impossible for newcomers to do this  
11    and avoid the many pitfalls of recovery. This book is a summary of our experiences,  
12    selected from our many collective years of recovery. For instance, should a recovering  
13    addict drink alcohol or take a medically prescribed narcotic? How can the addict  
14    combat the craving for a drug? These are among the many topics discussed in this  
15    book.

16    However, this book is not exhaustive. Nearly any member of Narcotics Anonymous  
17    has additional good ideas. Nor is this book to be interpreted in any sense as the  
18    Narcotics Anonymous program. That consists of the meetings, the fellowship, our  
19    literature, the Twelve Steps to recovery. Rather, this book should be considered a  
20    handbook of practical suggestions that can help the newcomer to cope more  
21    effectively with a drug-free life on a day-to-day basis and to utilize better all aspects of  
22    recovery offered by the Narcotics Anonymous program.

23    Narcotics Anonymous does not formally endorse all the opinions and suggestions  
24    offered in this book. However, any suggestions we make have in the past been useful  
25    to many of our members, and we hope they will be useful to you.

26    In consulting this book you should try to keep an open mind and to exercise your own  
27    discrimination. Any principle, no matter how valid, can be perverted. For instance, one

28 of the suggestions we give about combating the craving for a drug by eating a  
29 nutritious snack can easily be rationalized into a scheme for compulsive eating. And  
30 sometimes a chronically unemployed member justifies his situation by deferring to the  
31 slogan, Easy does it!

32 Above all, try to be open minded about the spiritual matters discussed here. Although  
33 many of us entered the fellowship violently opposed to ideas such as God and religion,  
34 our collective experience has taught us that nothing will defeat us as surely as  
35 indifference to our spiritual growth. What exactly that expression means differs from  
36 one person to the next, but it usually has little to do with any of our preconceived ideas  
37 about God or religion.

38 One sometimes hears that the program is like a cafeteria. One takes the food one  
39 wants and leaves the rest behind, presumably to be taken by someone else or even the  
40 same member later on in recovery. However, as no one can fare well on a diet  
41 consisting solely of starches and desserts, so we need a balance of ideas in our lives. If  
42 you object to or fail to understand something you read here, make a mental note to  
43 look at it sometime later in your recovery. You may find your appetite for it has  
44 changed.

45 Our discussion of the Steps here is necessarily brief, and we can give no more than an  
46 overview of how we apply these vitally important principles to our lives. After reading  
47 our discussion you will undoubtedly seek a more in-depth knowledge of the Steps. To  
48 acquire this, you should make Step meetings a regular part of your meeting schedule.

49 For us, recovery starts by quitting the use of mood-changing chemicals. But that is only  
50 the start. Stopping is easy. Staying stopped is hard. It requires that we be prepared to  
51 change our habits, attitudes, actions, and personalities. We discover we can no longer  
52 act or think the way we used to and expect to stay clean. We hope this booklet will help  
53 you to make the necessary changes, and we hope it will convince you that there are  
54 others who were once in your situation who have, through the program of Narcotics  
55 Anonymous, discovered fullness of life.

## 56 **Are you an addict?**

57 So you're new in Narcotics Anonymous? We're glad to have you here. We think you'll  
58 meet a lot of people whose experiences you'll identify with, people you'll like. In  
59 appearance our members don't differ much from people you might see on an average  
60 street in an average city. Maybe they're a little younger, but that's because the problems  
61 we have in common tend to come up; early in life. Still, you'll find the middle-aged and  
62 older people are among us. We have cooks, housewives, salesmen, mechanics,  
63 secretaries, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, the unemployed. The whole spectrum of  
64 humanity is represented.

65 However, we do have things in common. At one time our lives seemed to have ground  
66 to a halt and no matter what we did nothing good seemed to happen to us. We  
67 suspected, but were not entirely certain, that drugs had something to do with it. Were  
68 drugs the cause of our problems or the result of them, we asked ourselves. Our  
69 opinions on this seemed to change, as yours undoubtedly have, from one moment to  
70 the next. When we began to attend meetings of Narcotics Anonymous we discovered  
71 the truth. You will, too.

72 Who comes into Narcotics Anonymous? Our histories are many and varied. There is  
73 the housewife recovering from a suicide attempt, not convinced the pills caused her to  
74 try to kill herself. They were just the method she used. Professionals, doctors and  
75 pharmacists in particular, needed one substance to get started in the morning and  
76 another one to get to bed at night; watching in horror as the habit slowly escalated.  
77 Soon they were taking an endless string of medications, each to counteract the side  
78 effects of the previous medication. We have students whose college careers are in a  
79 shambles because they've become paranoid and lost their motivation. "A pot addict?  
80 How could I be? Everyone smokes pot!" Additionally, there are the very young street  
81 drug users who could never even get their lives off the ground. They were high almost  
82 from the cradle. Then there are the defiant court ordered addicts, just out of drug  
83 rehab, who look down upon addicts that used differently than they did. Proudly stating,  
84 "Hell yes, I'm a junkie." We've all played that game in one form or another. We call it

85 “high but proud.” But despite the differences in our backgrounds, we all stayed around.  
86 Narcotics Anonymous brought drastic changes in all our attitudes towards ourselves,  
87 others, and above all, drugs and the disease of addiction. What do all drugs have in  
88 common? What they have in common is us. We’re drug addicts.

89 Drug addicts? Isn’t that an awfully strong phrase? For the housewife or student who  
90 never gets closer to a needle than a vintage stereo player it conjures up a bizarre image,  
91 maybe a dormitory with pale bodies on mattresses, spikes sticking out of arms and  
92 pools of blood congealing on the floor. But that, obviously, isn’t what you found when  
93 you came to NA. The people seem well-groomed, and are apparently happy. They’re  
94 full of energy, enthusiastic about sharing their feelings and hopes, their victories and  
95 defeats with others. The fact is, when we’re clean no one can tell us from the average  
96 person on the street.

97 What is a drug addict then? There are several good definitions, but one of our favorites  
98 is the following: Drug addicts are people who have lost the ability to control their lives  
99 because of the use of drugs.

100 We each have a favorite drug or drugs, our “drug of choice”; one sometimes hears it  
101 called at meetings. But we can switch addictions very easily. If one drug isn’t available,  
102 we will make do with another. Many are the addict who has tried to control an  
103 addiction by switching drugs. The result is always predictable. Sometimes we switch to  
104 alcohol or pot, because they are considered socially approved drugs. Falsely believing  
105 that some drugs are less dangerous to us than others, a disaster always follows. We  
106 have seen heroin addicts die from drinking alcohol. Taking a new drug will lead us back  
107 to using our drug of choice.

108 Like any other disorder, drug addiction has certain symptoms associated with it. These  
109 symptoms are remarkably predictable, despite the great variety of substances involved.

110 For instance, drug addiction is progressive. Look at the way you were last using,  
111 compare it with the way you were using two years ago, and then the way you were  
112 using when you began. Do you notice a progression? Undoubtedly. It’s downhill.



113 Drugs are causing you more pain now than they used to. True, there were periods in  
114 our using during which we used drugs very little or not at all. But we always found the  
115 plateau brief and our freedom from drugs only temporary.

116 Of course, there are other symptoms. We have found it effective to present some of  
117 the symptoms of drug addiction as a series of questions.

118 Perhaps you admit you have a problem with drugs, but seriously doubt you are an  
119 addict, or at least an addict in the same sense that we apply that word to ourselves. If  
120 you have such reservations, read the questions below and answer them carefully.

- 121 1) Is drug use making your life at home unhappy?
- 122 2) Have you ever switched from one drug to another or to multiple drugs,  
123 trying to find the perfect high?
- 124 3) Has your ambition decreased since using drugs?
- 125 4) Have you ever taken more than the prescribed dosage of a prescription  
126 drug, or resorted to lying to obtain it?
- 127 5) Have you ever stolen drugs?
- 128 6) Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of using drugs?
- 129 7) Do you use to feel less shy or to feel you belong?
- 130 8) Do you feel guilty about using?
- 131 9) Have you ever been in a hospital, jail, or drug rehabilitation center because  
132 of your using?
- 133 10) Does using interfere with your sleeping or eating?
- 134 11) Do you become defensive when people mention your drug using to you?
- 135 12) Does just having drugs in your possession give you a thrill?
- 136 13) Have you ever tried to stop using drugs?
- 137 14) Do you think a lot about using drugs?
- 138 15) Have you noticed your pattern of drug use changing recently?
- 139 16) Do you jealously guard your stash of drugs?

- 140 17) Are you plagued with indefinable fears?
- 141 18) Do you sometimes think you could get your life straightened out if you  
142 moved somewhere else?
- 143 19) Do you find yourself jealous, aggressive, angry, or resentful in situations  
144 that wouldn't have caused you to be some time ago?
- 145 20) Have you even gotten high when you were alone?
- 146 21) Do you regularly have to have a drug before going to sleep, or waking up?
- 147 22) Has your using affected your sexual desire or performance?
- 148 23) Do you ever take one drug to overcome the bad effects of another?
- 149 24) Do you have fewer friends now than two or three years ago?
- 150 25) Do you ever go on prolonged binges of drug usage?
- 151 26) Do you find yourself using drugs around people you think are inferior to  
152 you?
- 153 27) Have you ever used street drugs without knowing what's in them?
- 154 28) Does the idea of a life without drugs terrify you?
- 155 29) Have you ever had the shakes?
- 156 30) Do you use drugs to control your feelings?
- 157 31) Have you ever searched for a spiritual answer for your life, but couldn't  
158 seem to find it?
- 159 32) Do you enjoy getting high less than you used to?
- 160 33) Do you avoid your family when using?
- 161 34) Has your job performance ever suffered as a result of using drugs?
- 162 35) Do you ever feel you could do more with your life if you didn't use drugs?

163 Quite a list, isn't it? Note that some of the questions, numbers 19 and 31, for instance,  
164 don't even mention drugs. This is because addiction is an insidious problem that affects  
165 all areas of our lives, even those areas which seem at first glance to have little to do

166 with drugs. Further, no specific drug is mentioned. Though there are lots of different  
167 drugs, they all spell one disease for us.

168 Well, how did you do? This is a question only you can answer. We found that we all  
169 answered different numbers of these questions “Yes.” The actual number of “Yes”  
170 responses wasn’t as important as how we felt inside and how addiction had affected  
171 our lives. Once we begin to develop symptoms of drug addiction, the disease will  
172 invariably run its course, unless we arrest it by halting our drug use. One often hears it  
173 said that being a little bit of a drug addict is like being a little bit pregnant.

174 Some of us at first dismissed such tests with words like “Oh, that test’s screwed up,”  
175 “I’m special,” “I know I take drugs, but not because I’m an addict,” “I have real  
176 problems,” “I’m just having a tough time getting it together right now,” “I’ll be able to  
177 stop when I find the right person, get the right job, etc.” “I can stop whenever I want  
178 to. I just don’t want to.”

179 Suppose you come down with severe abdominal pains and a high fever. The doctor  
180 diagnoses acute appendicitis and schedules you for immediate surgery. Do you have it  
181 done? Of course. You’d be a fool not to. In other words, you have faith in his expertise  
182 and experience. Yet, you’ve probably never seen his medical diploma, or asked him  
183 what his standing was in his graduating class.

184 We in Narcotics Anonymous have expertise and experience, too: a direct, firsthand  
185 knowledge of drugs that’s rivaled by no other group of people on the face of the earth.  
186 Furthermore, we know what to do about a drug problem. Some of the people sitting  
187 around you at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting are clean, some for many years. The  
188 above questionnaire reflects our expertise with drugs. Why should you doubt us and  
189 not the doctor? We’ll tell you why. Drug addiction is a peculiar disease. It’s a disease  
190 that tells you; you don’t have it. It’s fatal, usually more unpleasantly so than  
191 appendicitis. Like appendicitis, there is a remedy. It’s called recovery or getting clean.  
192 We use these phrases interchangeably. By getting actively involved, the program of  
193 Narcotics Anonymous will keep you free of drugs one day of a time. Furthermore, NA

194 will provide you the tools necessary to build a life you've always been looking for; a life  
195 free from active addiction. Do you want to go for it? We hope so.

196

## 197 **What are your chances?**

198 We in Narcotics Anonymous believe that drug addiction is a progressive disease which,  
199 unless arrested, will invariably lead to jails, institutions or death. We believe that it  
200 cannot be cured, in the sense that the addict can never return to some kind of  
201 nondestructive drug use, but can only be arrested. The Narcotics Anonymous program  
202 acts to arrest our addiction by helping us to abstain from drugs, that is, from any  
203 substance that causes us to get high or that is either mind changing or mood altering.

204 For the person who has not yet faced his or her addiction squarely, the first sentence in  
205 the paragraph above is a very frightening one. It was for all of us. Even more  
206 frightening was the thought of having to endure a lifetime without drugs, deprived of  
207 any means of quieting our fears, forgetting our troubles, or lifting our spirits. It seemed  
208 like the cruelest possible fate. One newcomer said it sounded like being buried alive.

209 But this is the choice you must make. You are now standing at the great turning point  
210 in your life. You will choose to either travel the way we have traveled, or to return to  
211 the life you have come from. The decision we call it the First Step, has to be yours. We  
212 cannot make it for you; although once you make it we can help you in your life of  
213 recovery by sharing with you our experiences. The life of using is full of fear and  
214 loneliness. There is fear in being clean, too, but you can share that fear with others who  
215 care for you and thereby lessen it. Moreover, in recovery you will find joy, freedom,  
216 and love. For the first time in your life, you will feel like you belong. You will find you  
217 can finally quit running. You will find a home.

218 We have said that drug addiction is incurable. We know this because of our hard won  
219 experience. We have not yet seen an addict who can return to non-addictive drug use.

220 We have seen many try, and many die trying. Some are lucky that they are able to make  
221 it back to the program. On returning, they are always worse off than before. More than  
222 likely, some of the painful using experiences they had heard other addicts speak of at  
223 meetings and which had not yet happened to them did, in fact, happen when they  
224 resumed using drugs. Certain drugs they told themselves they would never use they  
225 ended up using, or an action like a lie, a theft, a deliberate cruelty, they had considered  
226 themselves incapable of what they found themselves committing.

227 Tragically, an event or an overdose had left them permanently afflicted. We know of  
228 addicts that are now blind, those that are terribly scarred, and some that are now  
229 disabled. Drug addiction is serious business.

230 In the program you may occasionally hear the words “relapse” or “slip” used. These  
231 terms refer to the actions of a member who resumes using drugs. Many of our  
232 members have never experienced a slip. However, we all have our own timetable for  
233 recovery. Some of us are not really ready when we reach Narcotics Anonymous, and  
234 we may find ourselves using again even after a prolonged period of staying clean.  
235 Those of us who resumed drug use, and have been fortunate enough to make it back  
236 to the program, always share the reality that our addiction is progressive. Even if you  
237 do not find continuous abstinence immediately, it is important that you keep coming  
238 back to meetings. None of our members will condemn or judge you. Although  
239 complete and continuous abstinence always furnishes the best ground for personal  
240 growth, it is possible for you to learn by attending meetings even though you cannot  
241 accumulate any length of clean time. The experience of being around people who are  
242 clean and getting better may, one day, give you the strength and courage to close the  
243 door on drugs.

244 At the very least, returning to using confronts us with new dimensions of despair and  
245 hopelessness. One addict who had tried it said he was genuinely surprised at the  
246 violence of it. And, it comes as a shock to us that we just cannot seem to get very high  
247 anymore. Nothing, no new or imaginative combination of chemicals, works to get us  
248 high. We go from being free of drugs to being helpless with almost no intervening

249 period of elation. Drugs, our closest, most faithful and dependable friends, have finally  
250 betrayed us. There is no way we can use and enjoy drugs the way we once did. Whether  
251 we know it or not, the party is over. If we can accept this fact, it will help us turn our  
252 backs on drugs and to move toward recovery. If we do not accept it, even though we  
253 stay clean, we will be stuck in a fantasyland, craving and obsessing about the chemicals  
254 that, in fact, can no longer give us much pleasure.

255 We believe there is a strong physical component in addiction. The progression of the  
256 disease reflects some yet undiscovered change in our body chemistry. There is no way  
257 we can change our body chemistry back to what it once was.

258 What are your chances? Without a program, very poor. Although we in Narcotics  
259 Anonymous don't keep statistics, it has been estimated that many addicts never  
260 recover. However, statistics are misleading, they are applicable only to large samples.  
261 They cannot describe individual cases. We in Narcotics Anonymous firmly believe that  
262 no one is any stronger or any weaker than anyone else. If you sincerely want what we  
263 have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it, your chances of getting clean are 100  
264 percent. We have never seen a person who lives the Narcotics Anonymous Program  
265 relapse. The steps you must take, and which are described in the rest of this book, are  
266 very simple. They are simple and practical. We are practical people. Coming to terms  
267 with the fatal nature of our addiction made us that way.

268

## 269 **Do I need a rehabilitation center?**

270 Occasionally the newcomer must make the decision to go into a rehab center or detox  
271 unit. This is a personal choice. Many of us who had the opportunity to start in a rehab  
272 found the safe surroundings a good place to kick start our recovery. Those of us with  
273 a severe physical dependency found the ability to allow our bodies to detox from drugs  
274 in an environment where we are monitored by medical professionals a healthy choice.  
275 We are generally very willing to help you find a facility for detoxification.

276 There are several good reasons for going to a rehab other than to weather out the  
277 effects of drug withdrawal. It may provide the newcomer with the opportunity to  
278 escape an intolerable living or working environment. Some examples are; the addicted  
279 pharmacist or doctor, a person who is living in an unhealthy environment,  
280 homelessness, or when some degree of financial dependence is on others. The  
281 newcomer should consider the possibility of going into a rehab.

282 There are a number of rehabs which are strongly program oriented, and their success  
283 rate is high. We tend to recommend these over rehabs whose orientation is more  
284 analytical, and in which the client is exposed to attack therapy or endless probing for  
285 “causes” of using. We addicts, being cunning and very perceptive about the  
286 expectations others have of us, fit into such an analytical environment beautifully. We  
287 can manufacture more crises, insights and breakthroughs in a week than ten ordinary  
288 people.

289 But deep down we don’t really believe a word of it, and it generally only delays our  
290 confronting the true issue: our addiction.

291 If you are confused and don’t know whether you need a rehab or not, discuss it with  
292 program people. A good rule of thumb is: If people tell you that you need a rehab, you  
293 probably do.

294

## 295 **What is Narcotics Anonymous?**

296 Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who are drug addicts but  
297 who no longer use. We are not composed of professional, social, health, or  
298 government workers except as such people may themselves be addicts. The only  
299 requirement for membership in Narcotics Anonymous is the desire to quit using drugs.  
300 We do not care what drugs you used or what your past activities were. Our only  
301 concern is whether or not you wish to get clean.

302 Narcotics Anonymous is not associated with any religious sect or governmental  
303 organization and does not oppose nor endorse any special causes. We exist solely to  
304 stay clean ourselves and help other addicts to get clean. You will be charged nothing  
305 for membership in Narcotics Anonymous; we support ourselves through our own  
306 contributions.

307 We believe that drug addiction is not a single disorder but rather a three-fold illness:  
308 physical, mental/emotional, spiritual. The way that our addiction affects each of these  
309 aspects of our being and the way the program works to relieve our addiction by healing  
310 these parts of us are the subjects of this book.

311 Quite briefly, the healing we receive through Narcotics Anonymous comes through  
312 meetings, the strength and support offered by the fellowship, working the twelve steps  
313 and twelve traditions, and the application of spiritual principles in our lives.

314 Based on an enormous amount of observation and firsthand experience, once  
315 addicted, no one can return to the normal use of drugs. It is for this reason that  
316 Narcotics Anonymous is a program whose immediate goal is complete abstinence  
317 from all drugs. We stop using, period. The program gives us the strength, one day at a  
318 time, not to pick up the first drug.

319 Narcotics Anonymous does not make a decision as to whether you or any other  
320 person is a drug addict. We can tell you what certain symptoms of drug addiction are  
321 and share some of our experiences with you. The diagnosis of your own condition you  
322 alone can make.

323 Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues. We do not, for instance, get  
324 involved with efforts to legalize or penalize the use of any drug. To do so would detract  
325 each addict from their primary purpose: to get and stay clean.

326 Narcotics Anonymous has worked for us. Our combined membership has  
327 accumulated centuries of continuous clean time. Most of us had tried other ways to rid  
328 ourselves of the problems caused by drugs. These methods usually consisted of



329 redefining our addiction in purely medical or psychological terms. We as an  
330 organization have no direct quarrel with such therapies, for us they simply did not  
331 work. They held out to us hope, but the hope was soon betrayed. Perhaps we even  
332 thought we had finally found the causes for our use of drugs; nevertheless, we still  
333 used. Among us we could write a guide book to therapies. It was as a last resort many  
334 of us came into Narcotics Anonymous: bitter, cynical, without hope. It was there, in  
335 working the program of NA, that we were given new lives.

336 A new life can be yours for the asking, too. There is no problem that you can  
337 conceivably have that other Narcotics Anonymous members have not had. The  
338 Narcotics Anonymous program can help us to overcome or live with any problem. We  
339 all thought we were somehow special or unusual. It was one mechanism we used for  
340 keeping ourselves isolated and addicted. We were college graduates or we never  
341 finished high school or we were gay or of the wrong social class or had extraordinary  
342 physical or emotional problems. We came to see all of these as cop-outs. You will find,  
343 as we did, that recovering drug addicts are all alike in the only way that matters. When  
344 you come into Narcotics Anonymous you are no longer alone.

345 Narcotics Anonymous has meetings in the major American cities, in small  
346 communities, in rural areas and abroad. If you travel, you will find you are part of a  
347 great and growing fellowship. The help is everywhere and is yours only for the asking.

348

## 349 **Meetings**

350 “Go to meetings, meetings and more meetings,” is the advice we get as newcomers,  
351 “and when you’re sick and tired of meetings go to still more meetings.” One  
352 newcomer was astonished to hear his sponsor tell him that he was so sick he needed  
353 meetings nine days a week. In fact, the most frequent advice to newcomers is, “Go to  
354 ninety meetings in ninety days.”

355 The fact is, meetings form the basis of Narcotics Anonymous. Without meetings, we  
356 would fail to function as an organization doing what we exist to do. For members of  
357 Narcotics Anonymous, meetings are the single most important means of getting and  
358 staying clean. Those of us who relapse into drug use have usually slowed down or  
359 stopped our meeting attendance, and it seems those of us who attend the most  
360 meetings have the most well-balanced and gratifying recovery.

361 Meetings are to us what tools and materials are to a carpenter. They are the materials  
362 with which we build a new life.

363 It is important for us to remember that the game of using occupied all our time. Even  
364 when we weren't using drugs we were thinking about using drugs. When drugs, and the  
365 Game of getting them, are taken from our lives an enormous void opens within us.  
366 "What am I going to do with my time?" we wonder. And the question is asked more in  
367 panic than in curiosity. It seems as though the center has been yanked from our lives.  
368 We suddenly discover we don't know how to behave with others, how to carry on a  
369 casual conversation or even where to put our hands-without the reassuring roles using  
370 provided us.

371 It is meetings that fill up the void and work to change us. The effect they have on our  
372 attitudes is unimaginable to one who has not experienced them. A member, now clean  
373 many years, recalls his first year in the program. "Every day I felt suicidal. I would say  
374 to myself, 'Well, I promised them I would do ninety meetings in ninety days. I'll go to a  
375 meeting tonight and then I'll kill myself.' After I left the meeting I would wonder why I  
376 had been so upset."

377 In meetings our fear is replaced with faith, self-pity with concern for others, despair  
378 with hope, resentment with understanding, self-loathing with self-acceptance. We  
379 aren't alone anymore; we are loved and valued and accepted for what we are and,  
380 above all, understood for the first time in our lives by those who have been through  
381 what we have been through. No one sits in judgment of us. We experience continually  
382 the miracle that a problem shared is a problem halved. You will not find meetings to be  
383 advice bureaus however. Many of our problems, perhaps most, have no handy, neat

384 solutions. The solution, if there is any, lies in sharing the problem. Through sharing it  
385 we grow. The problem is still there, but we have grown a little beyond it.

386 Go, then, to meetings. Ninety meetings in ninety days is certainly good advice. At least  
387 get to several a week. You will be given a meeting list. That, a map and determination  
388 are all you need. At first, we are stunned with the inconvenience of getting to and from  
389 all those meetings. “Several meetings a week? They’re miles from where I live! I can’t  
390 do that!” If you have such misgivings, we have a little mental exercise we would like  
391 you to try. Put yourself back in one of the darkest periods in your addiction.

392 It’s 2:30 in the morning and you’re out of dope. You’re withdrawing, and it’s a bad  
393 one: the sweats, the shakes, and the anxiety. Then you find out that, in a locker in a  
394 Greyhound bus station in a city fifty miles away, is a bundle waiting for you. Its chock  
395 full of your drug of choice, and it’s all yours. Would you get there?

396 We ask you to travel several miles, not fifty, at 8 p.m., not 2:30 a.m. If you don’t have a  
397 car or if public transportation isn’t available you can usually find a member who will  
398 give you a ride. Ask around. Meetings are as essential to our staying clean as drugs were  
399 to our using. We are simply too sick to survive otherwise. Without them our recovery  
400 will be perilous and short-lived, hardly less of a nightmare than our using.

401 Let’s talk about the format of the typical Narcotics Anonymous meeting. Our meetings  
402 generally open with the reading of a preamble which briefly describes the organization  
403 of Narcotics Anonymous and defines the purpose of its members. There are several  
404 kinds of meeting formats.

405 One of the most common kinds of meetings is the speaker-discussion meeting. During  
406 the first part of the meeting, the speaker, a Narcotics Anonymous member who has  
407 accumulated some recovery time, simply tells his story. He or She describes what their  
408 life was like before they came into Narcotics Anonymous and what it is like now that  
409 they are clean. The purpose of the first part of the story is to put you, and the speaker,  
410 in touch with what using was like. The reason for such a talk is that we human beings  
411 tend to forget pain easily. It is a psychological defense mechanism we use constantly.

412 Remembering two weeks later what it was like to burn our hand on a stove never  
413 conveys the intensity the experience had for us at the time, nor the day after. This very  
414 human trait has its advantages. What kind of life would it be if we were continually  
415 besieged with our most painful past experiences, replayed in living color? A selective  
416 memory, however, can work against our staying clean. We need to remember, if only  
417 briefly, what it was like to be in jail, to wake up in an emergency ward, to endure the  
418 looks of disappointment on the faces of our family and friends when they discovered  
419 we had lied to them and stolen from them. We do not wallow masochistically in our  
420 past. More often than not, the recall of our using experiences that the speaker arouses  
421 in us is accompanied by a profound gratitude. “Thank God I don’t have to go through  
422 that again!”

423 Because of the differences in our backgrounds and the variety of substances we abused  
424 it is hardly likely that you will identify with all the facts of a speaker’s story. Nor is it  
425 necessary that you do so. Try, instead, to identify with their feelings. What does a  
426 physician addicted to prescription drugs have in common with a street addict? Many  
427 things. They both know, for example, what it feels like to be alone and desperate at  
428 2:30 in the morning, not clean but not really high either, out of drugs or unable to  
429 discover the combination of drugs that will work.

430 It may happen, particularly when the speaker has not been clean a long time that their  
431 using story swells out to fill the whole talk. The speaker got in more fights, pulled off  
432 more burglaries, dealt more dope, schemed more cleverly than anyone else. It occurs to  
433 us that what the speaker is really doing is bragging. Such stories are unfortunate,  
434 because no one can grow by telling them. It means we’re still stuck in the Game. The  
435 speaker should really be talking about those things they are ashamed to talk about,  
436 hustling their body, for instance or becoming sick and helpless at an event they had  
437 wanted very much to be straight for. Generally, as we continue to stay clean, our using  
438 experiences come to occupy their proper place in our talks. We get in touch with our  
439 recovery, with all the tremendous vitality and potential it opens up to us.

440 We can turn using stories into our advantage when we are in the audience: We can use  
441 them to develop patience, a character trait that's always been in pretty short supply  
442 throughout our lives.

443 During the second half of the speaker's talk--the recovery part, we find how the  
444 speaker got clean. We hear about the tools that were used, the principles that were  
445 applied, to stay clean and to find some happiness in life. The profound message in this  
446 part of the talk is hope. We can identify with the speaker's addiction so perhaps we can  
447 identify with the recovery. "If the speaker is staying clean, so can I," the newcomer  
448 says. "There is hope for me."

449 The discussion part of the meeting provides us all with the chance to share. We may  
450 talk about the experiences or feelings we have in common with the speaker. We may  
451 talk about a living problem we are struggling with or we may use this as an opportunity  
452 to express gratitude for the rewards that staying clean has brought into our lives.

453 What, as a newcomer, should be your role in the discussion part of a meeting? You  
454 should speak if you can, but if not, don't use your silence to put yourself down.  
455 Someone once asked the Quaker leader William Penn about participation in Quaker  
456 meetings. The questioner didn't know whether he should speak or keep silent and  
457 would get involved in endless debates with himself before, during and after the meeting  
458 about what he should or should not do. He had worked himself up into such a state  
459 over the issue that he was receiving no spiritual help from the meetings, his very reason  
460 for attending them. Penn's reply was that the man should go to meetings neither  
461 prepared to speak nor prepared to remain silent.

462 There's a message in that for us. All our lives, most of us thought in terms of what we  
463 should or should not do. What we have never done was to allow ourselves simply to be  
464 part of an experience and to give up our attempts at control. If we do this and if we  
465 have spoken too little at meetings, we will then speak. If we have spoken too often, we  
466 can find silence. Some new members are advised to take the cotton out of their ears  
467 and put it in their mouths. One way of doing this is to get out of your own head and  
468 into the speaker's; stop processing what you are going to say when your turn comes.

469 You may find silence, which can be an expression of your bond with other members,  
470 more meaningful to you than anything you might say.

471 Another kind of meeting is the Step meeting. In these meetings we talk about ways of  
472 applying the Twelve Steps to our daily lives. These meetings may or may not have a  
473 speaker. If so, the speaker will tend to concentrate on the particular Step being  
474 discussed. When there is no speaker, program literature dealing with the Step is often  
475 read and a discussion follows in which those attending relate their experiences with the  
476 Step. Although the first couple of months of recovery are a little early for you to be  
477 concerned about the detailed mechanics of applying some of the Steps to your life, you  
478 should start thinking in terms of the Steps now and should include Step meetings in  
479 your schedule of meetings. There are a few Steps you should begin working  
480 immediately, particularly the First Step: “We admitted that we were powerless over our  
481 addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.” Step meetings will help you learn  
482 to apply the other Steps in the proper sequence at the proper time.

483 It may happen that you find yourself unable to concentrate in a meeting. Perhaps  
484 you’re preoccupied with a living problem or you’re anticipating something that’s going  
485 to happen next week. There’s a useful little prayer you can use when this happens:  
486 “God, help me to be here and help me to be now.”

487 About half-way through the meeting a basket is passed. Narcotics Anonymous has no  
488 fees or dues, as we told you, but we do have expenses we have to meet: literature,  
489 coffee supplies, rent money. The money we pay for meeting space is usually symbolic,  
490 since the institutions hosting our meetings usually charge us minimal rent. It signifies  
491 that recovering addicts can be financially responsible, that we have learned how to use  
492 money in nondestructive ways. If you are working, you should give something. Reflect,  
493 as the basket passes you, on how much the program has given you and how little it  
494 asks in return.

495 Narcotics Anonymous meetings are classified as open or closed. Most meetings are  
496 closed, that is, open only to recovering addicts. Some are open, which means any  
497 concerned person who wishes to learn more about the program may attend. Doctors

498 and other health workers and members of the family of recovering or still-using addicts  
499 often attend open meetings. It is always made clear which meetings are open meetings.  
500 You may wish to be more guarded in your comments at an open meeting.

501 At a closed meeting, of course, you talk about whatever you wish. It is very good self-  
502 discipline, however, to leave at a meeting what you hear at a meeting. It is better not to  
503 tell even other members of Narcotics Anonymous what you have heard. Even older  
504 members forget this important principle. We all need to remind ourselves of the  
505 privileged nature of what is revealed in a closed meeting.

506 Our meetings generally close with the Serenity Prayer.

507 We have found it is good self-discipline to open and close our meetings on time. If  
508 you're late getting there, you'll be late for the meeting. Being frequently late to meetings  
509 is not a good sign; conversing with those near us during meetings is not a good sign;  
510 refusing to put money in the basket is not a good sign. After all, how much did a  
511 bundle of dope cost us? These are all ways we express our anger and our rebellion. It's  
512 much better to confront these qualities head-on, like talking about them at a meeting.

513

## 514 **Complete Abstinence**

515 “There is no cure for addiction, but recovery is possible by a program of abstinence  
516 and simple spiritual principle.” (NA White Book, 1983) Narcotics Anonymous is a  
517 program of complete abstinence from all mind-altering, mood-changing drugs. We  
518 were in the beginning, still are now, and always will be a program of complete  
519 abstinence.

520 In Narcotics Anonymous we only focus on ourselves and the fellowship. What occurs  
521 in society, is per our Traditions, an outside issue. Drug Replacement Therapy (DRT),  
522 Medical Assisted Treatment (MAT), and Medically Assisted Recovery (MAR) are  
523 outside issues. NA has no comments on this. However, when people are attending

524 our meetings on DRT/MAT/MAR programs it becomes an inside issue. And we, in  
525 NA, have much to say on that.

526 Our program is guided by a set of principles as defined in the 12 Traditions of NA.  
527 Our 3rd Tradition states that “the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop  
528 using.” That said, someone on DRT/MAT/MAR may attend any NA meeting as  
529 long as they have the desire to stop using MATs too. They may even become a  
530 member of a Home Group. However, they are not “clean” and may not serve in any  
531 NA Service position that has a clean time requirement.

532 Society, the treatment industry, some doctors and psychiatrist are promoting the notion  
533 that if an addict is on DRT, MAT, MAR or Medical Marijuana that they are clean; that  
534 in fact, they are not using drugs. Society often feels that as long as an addict is not  
535 stealing TVs and can hold down a job that they are recovering. When in actuality,  
536 society has simply been removed from the direct impact of active addiction. We in NA  
537 ask the question of the addict, “Just because you can go to work now, and stopped  
538 stealing are you really recovering? Do you really feel connected to humanity and are  
539 you enjoying life?” In NA we believe the answer is “No.” Do you find yourself  
540 checking your phone; seeing when the clinic opens and stressing how a major event  
541 may affect your ability to cop (get your dose).

542 Addiction is a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual disease. Therefore so is  
543 Recovery. Just because the physical and part of the mental components of ourselves  
544 have been masked by a drug, albeit legally prescribed, we are not fully recovering.

545 As long as we are ingesting chemicals, even if that chemical is grown in nature, we are  
546 depriving ourselves of the ability to love more deeply, live life more fully, and feel more  
547 authentically. We are masking our emotions and suffocating our spiritual growth. With  
548 a life of complete abstinence we are free to grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and  
549 spiritually with no limitations and unlimited possibilities.



550

## 551 **People, places and things: The Game**

552 There is a saying one occasionally hears in Narcotics Anonymous, “Scoring is more fun  
553 than using.” Like many catchy sayings, it isn’t entirely true. After all, drugs were always  
554 our payoff. Yet there’s enough truth in it to cause anyone once seriously into drugs to  
555 smile in recognition.

556 For us drugs didn’t just grow on trees. Getting them required us to interact with people  
557 in specific situations. We had to perform a series of more or less predictable acts; the  
558 trip to the doctor’s office, waiting for the connection and so forth, before the treasure  
559 was finally ours. For us drugs have always been part of a complex series of activities.  
560 No good fairy ever said, “Here take this. Have a ball!”

561 Let us call the whole business of getting and using drugs; the waiting, the scoring, the  
562 dealing, even those activities necessary to finance the deal, burglary or robbery, and so  
563 forth: the Game, for lack of a better word. When we first started using drugs, the  
564 Game was an annoying and frightening necessity. It was something we had to go  
565 through in order to get the drugs we wanted. Our first experience with an imaginary  
566 medical complaint in the doctor’s office or a forged prescription of a burglary was  
567 terrifying. But as we kept playing the Game, something happened. We found we were  
568 beginning to enjoy it. We liked the excitement it offered, the sense of power and  
569 getting over on people, the secretiveness, the complex paraphernalia, the thrill of being  
570 outside the law and the gratifying feeling of knowing exactly what we were doing.  
571 Toward the end, in fact, it was hard to tell whether we were more addicted to the  
572 Game or to the drug. The drug led to the Game, the Game led to the drug.

573 One of the most difficult tasks we face in Narcotics Anonymous is in giving up the  
574 Game as well as giving up the drug. Faced with the somewhat terrifying prospect of  
575 building a new life for ourselves, we are often confused about exactly what the rules are  
576 or how everything should fit together. So it’s natural that in moments of insecurity or  
577 self-doubt our minds should return once more to the security of the Game. Naturally,

578 we're never very objective when we're thinking this way. We tend to forget what it was  
579 like when the Game and drugs blew up in our faces. The overdoses, jails, hospitals, and  
580 suicide attempts became common place. Our memories are selective. We remember  
581 what it was like five or ten years before. Then we were in charge, and everything ran as  
582 smoothly as a car engine.

583 Getting the Game out of our minds tends to be more difficult than getting the drugs  
584 out of our bodies. If we get back into the Game our chances of survival are very poor.  
585 It's just too difficult to turn down the payoff.

586 At times the subject of the Game surfaces in surprising ways at Narcotics Anonymous  
587 meetings. A member, clean a month or so, may admit he still occasionally deals.  
588 Another admits he copped and then threw the dope away. Someone clean a year has  
589 an inexplicable urge to visit a doctor's office and get a prescription, "Just to see  
590 whether I could still do it." An ex-junkie experiences the overwhelming desire to shoot  
591 ice water into her veins. We have heard ex-junkies admit they were as addicted to the  
592 needle as to the drug. It all shows what a hold the Game has on us. As one member  
593 put it, drugs never come at us through the front door.

594 If we are to survive we must push all aspects of the Game out of our lives. The  
595 necessity for doing this is sometimes summed up in the warning phrase, "people,  
596 places, things." We must push out of our lives the people we used drugs with, those  
597 relationships within which using drugs was a natural thing to do, the places we hung  
598 out when we used drugs, and the things which our mind connects with drugs.

599 Each of us has to define for himself or herself the meaning of "people, places, and  
600 things." We all know our own level of comfort. If we are honest and securely centered  
601 in the program we can usually, but not always, be aware of what constitutes a threat to  
602 us and act accordingly. Certainly, paraphernalia and the drugs themselves have to go.  
603 These are the first things we throw out.

604 The following story reveals that there may be hidden dangers. One member, clean six  
605 months, whose drug of choice was alcohol, found herself buying booze, pouring it out

606 and lining the bottles up on her kitchen shelf. “It’s just that I think the bottles are very  
607 decorative,” she explained. But her sponsor wasn’t convinced, and insisted she discard  
608 the bottles. Bottles, of course, are the paraphernalia of the alcoholic. We are obsessed  
609 by paraphernalia. They are to our Game what Chance, Community chest and Property  
610 Cards are to Monopoly. Can any of us walk past a head shop without closely inspecting  
611 the contents of the window?

612 Yes, the Game and its trappings are cunning, baffling, and powerful. It will make every  
613 attempt to suck us back into it. It’s not necessarily that we intend to be devious or  
614 underhanded; it’s that we can’t always spot our own Game--although we do get better  
615 at it. The program is lifesaving because other people can spot our Games, and if we are  
616 in constant and intimate personal contact with recovering addicts, we will not be  
617 ensnared. The minute we make a move toward the Game, someone will call us on it.  
618 “Hey, that’s a crazy thing to do!” This is where talking with a sponsor and talking at  
619 meetings can be particularly valuable.

620 Sometimes our bodies tell us when we are getting close to the Game even when our  
621 minds refuse to recognize it. We often experience a definite physiological reaction, for  
622 instance, when we walk into a bar or a porno shop. We find our hearts beating faster,  
623 our stomachs filling with butterflies; perhaps our heads begin to buzz. Although  
624 alcohol may not have been our drug of choice, such a reaction in a bar is invariably a  
625 response to a Game which is similar enough to our own to constitute a real threat to  
626 our staying clean. We must act accordingly. If we found a door going in, we can find a  
627 door leading out.

628 Generally, we must avoid personal contact with people we used drugs with. Carrying  
629 out the resolution to separate ourselves from them may involve for us some  
630 inconvenience and personal sacrifice. It may mean moving from the old neighborhood,  
631 changing jobs, or separating for the moment from some members of one’s family.  
632 Actions like this are essential to our survival. These people can kill us as surely as if they  
633 assaulted us with a lethal weapon. They were our fellow players, and they want us back  
634 in the Game.

635 You may say, “What about personal loyalty? These people were my friends.” Really?  
636 Ask yourself how many of them visited you when you were in a detox, or sent you  
637 cards or letters when you were in jail or a rehab. They do not have your best interests at  
638 heart. They want you back, all right. Because you’ve been clean a little while, you’ve got  
639 money, and you may be able to provide more than your share of drugs. You can bet  
640 they don’t want a recovered addict hanging around. If you call yourself an addict, and  
641 they played the Game with you, what does that make them? In ways subtle and not so  
642 subtle, they will try to get you to use.

643 Imagine yourself participating in the following little scenario. You’re the first speaker.

644 “I’m staying clean now.”

645 “Oh that’s great. We’re really happy for you. Did you hear Jim’s back? He’s on the  
646 street, though. Says the people at the rehab really screwed his head up. That’s the same  
647 place you went to, isn’t it? I think he’s still in love with you.”

648 This brief interchange is typical of a thousand different possible situations in which the  
649 underlying purpose is always the same: we are being emotionally set up to use.

650 “But I can help Jim,” is the usual first reaction. Jim can be helped, all right, but not by  
651 you. He recognizes you only as a Player of the Game. He can get his help the same way  
652 you got yours, when he decides he wants it. There is one fact we constantly emphasize  
653 to newcomers: Narcotics Anonymous is a save-your-own-ass program. The  
654 newcomers in the program are so swamped with their own problems that they simply  
655 can’t manufacture help for anyone else. You have to have it to give it away, as the  
656 saying goes. Let the old timers provide the emergency relief. The only help you can  
657 provide the still suffering addict right now is through the example of your own  
658 recovery.

659 We must constantly decide, often on a moment’s notice, whether a particular event or  
660 person constitutes part of people, places and things. An innocent office party may turn  
661 into a marijuana and cocaine bash. Or you find yourself at a musical event where

662 everyone else is stoned. If we are cautious, however, such emergencies will occur only  
663 rarely. If we are on firm spiritual ground, such behavior will strike us as more boring  
664 than anything else. If you are in such a situation, remember telephones are everywhere,  
665 and you have a list of people who would like to hear from you. Moreover, if you read  
666 the section “Being assertive,” you will learn some techniques for handling the pressures  
667 which arise. Remember, you have the right to stay alive.

668 For the street addict, a street image is part of the role the Game calls for; the  
669 appearance, the street language, the attitude. We may find ourselves hanging in places  
670 where the users hang, working night shift in an all-night store or a pizza parlor, for  
671 instance. When we refuse to clean up our dress, when we continue to use street  
672 language, when we insist on hanging out, what we are really saying is this: “Look. I  
673 want to give up the drugs. But I can’t give up the Game. It’s the only thing I know. If I  
674 give it up, I may disappear.” In short, we are afraid. To us no one comes across more  
675 afraid than an addict being tough.

676 Such addicts show a bullheaded resistance to the suggestion that they move from the  
677 neighborhood. Their excuses for staying come so fast and furious that it is a sure sign  
678 they are covering up. They find themselves being sucked into fights by street toughs  
679 and rationalize the fighting: “Man, no one calls me that.” What they can’t explain is  
680 why they are still living in an environment where fighting is such a natural thing to do.

681 We admit that such addicts do not necessarily relapse into using drugs, at least, not  
682 immediately. But they have made the decision to resist change, and we know change is  
683 the name of the only healthy Game. These addicts are to be seen at meetings, bitterly  
684 unhappy, battling everyone and everything, complaining ceaselessly about the very  
685 events and people they have chosen to stay among. It takes all their energy to hide the  
686 fact that they are at war with themselves and the spiritual principles of the program.  
687 They have made themselves part of people, places and things.

688 Not infrequently we have to admit that activities and situations which once gave us a  
689 great deal of legitimate pleasure are part of people, places and things. Music which we  
690 once genuinely loved listening to or playing has become infected with drug

691 associations, or a relationship in which there was at one time a great deal of love has  
692 become so damaged that now the two people involved can only use the relationship to  
693 keep themselves sick.

694 You must take a honest look at such holdovers from your using days. You must be  
695 prepared to make some tough decisions. We can say to you that it is better perhaps not  
696 to think of it as giving something up, rather think of it as letting something go.  
697 Narcotics Anonymous is a day-at-a-time program. Getting involved with the program,  
698 meeting new friends, exploring yourself, applying the steps to your life will ease the  
699 pain of separation.

700 All things change. Because music or a relationship is part of people, places and things  
701 today does not mean it will be a year from now. You may come to terms with the  
702 factors in yourself which cause you to use the music in a self-punishing way, or the  
703 partner in the relationship may decide to opt for a little change, too. In Narcotics  
704 Anonymous we have witnessed some very miraculous rejoining.

705

## 706 **Giving up roles: the toughest-kid on the block**

707 Naturally, to play a Game requires a role. We liked a role because it gave us some kind  
708 of power over people or events. We addicts; who seem to be manipulative by nature  
709 and frightened those others may see us for what we are experts in adopting convincing  
710 roles. Sometimes we hear members admit at a meeting the delight they felt on realizing  
711 they were hooked on drugs. "I realized I was a junkie. Great! At last I knew what I  
712 was."

713 Our addiction provided us with a readymade role in a readymade Game. How  
714 convenient! No growing pains, no problems in coming to terms with ourselves or  
715 others, no need to establish priorities for our lives. We were the roles we played, and  
716 the only priorities were the drugs we used. The woman could be a suffering and well-  
717 protected housewife, another a hooker whose problem was never drugs, only the fact

718 that all the men in the world were so lousy. A man could be a dealer (actually, we all  
719 liked to imagine we were dealers--maybe with extended runs of bad luck) and another  
720 rough, gruff biker, shaking his fist at the world. All these roles provided instant self-  
721 justification: We were right and suffered heroically the fate of all visionaries; it was the  
722 world that was screwed up. But we were really like the Wizard of Oz, frantically hoping  
723 that people would be so impressed by the thunder we were making that they wouldn't  
724 notice the lonely, frightened person working the controls inside.

725 At last, coming into the Narcotics Anonymous program, we have the chance to leave  
726 the roles outside the door. What a relief, taking all that armor off. But scary, too! "If  
727 I'm not that, I'm not anything," is our first reaction. But we are something, always have  
728 been, even on our worst moments. We just haven't discovered it yet. Most of us firmly  
729 agree with the psychologist Carl Rogers who believes that the person we bury under all  
730 our roles is the good person, the worthwhile person, the person we want to get to  
731 know. Often we have paid the heavy toll that role-playing demands: we've surrendered  
732 all our positive feelings. "When I came into the program," one member recalls, "I  
733 could feel only the savage emotions: anger and fear." But the person inside has those  
734 feelings in safekeeping, ready to make a gift of them to us.

735 The tough image: streetwise, cool, mean, cynical, is one of the deadliest roles.  
736 Negativity is so much easier to hide behind than being positive. "Man, this world is  
737 screwed up." People were to be used, hurt, conned, manipulated, and got over on.  
738 Strange that all the persons we damaged seem to have survived, flourished in fact. It's  
739 us whose lives are in tatters. Who actually gets hurt? Look in the mirror sometime and  
740 ask the person there.

741 Of course, being tough isn't the only role an addict can play. Some of us played the role  
742 of doormat *watch me suffer*, the party-person, or the sophisticate. Whatever role we  
743 played, it was designed to keep people away, to keep them and us from discovering  
744 what we were really like.

745 Of course any role is difficult to give up. However, you can do it. Ask yourself: Did  
746 you really like yourself when you were playing a role? Did it get you what you really  
747 wanted?

748

## 749 **Taking care of yourself**

750 All of our lives it seems we have been looking for some kind of magic; some  
751 complicated but easy way of getting our lives straightened out. But just when we  
752 thought we had our situation figured out, analyzed to perfection, we found ourselves  
753 once again sick, desperate, and lonely. Figuring out what screwed us up never seemed  
754 to keep us from getting screwed up. Imagine our surprise when we came into  
755 Narcotics Anonymous and found a program for living that wasn't complicated and  
756 wasn't easy. It was simple and hard. But, it worked, where all of our beautiful and  
757 ingenious analyses had failed. And we discovered an amazing fact: Getting clean  
758 doesn't involve accomplishing major things; it just involves doing lots of little things on  
759 a daily basis.

760 Many of these things can be summed up in the phrase, "We learned to take care of  
761 ourselves." This meant doing something we had never done before: establishing a daily  
762 routine of activities which would increase our regard for ourselves as persons: making  
763 our beds, shaving, showering, brushing our teeth, eating three reasonably balanced  
764 meals a day, learning to budget our money, learning to cook, wearing neat clothes,  
765 getting the laundry done, tidying up our environment, keeping appointments.  
766 Obviously; we never had time for these things when we were using. We were too busy  
767 hustling. Who can eat on a meth run, or brush one's teeth the morning after a drunken  
768 binge? Many are the times we bought new underwear, or didn't wear any, because we  
769 couldn't get it together to do the laundry. Frankly, we didn't like ourselves enough to  
770 take care of ourselves.

771 The above mentioned daily activities are more than just frills; they constitute the very  
772 basis of our recovery because they form an organized structure within which the



773 program can work. We become dependable. Moreover, these activities establish who  
774 we are as people. We become persons who are worth taking care of. The morning  
775 mirror becomes a friend rather than an enemy. The person in it is clean and let's face it,  
776 loveable. We can honestly say to the mirror, "You're not all I want you to be. You're  
777 not all you can be. But you look pretty good to me today!"

778 Sometimes a day comes along when we can't seem to manage even the smallest  
779 responsibilities: we don't bath; we skip meals, show up for a meeting half-an-hour late,  
780 and miss appointments. What we're really saying is "Today I don't like myself very  
781 much. I don't even want to be this person." On days like this you can do something  
782 else you've probably never learned to do. Be gentle with yourself. You don't have a  
783 failed life. You're clean. You're a member of a loving fellowship. The development of  
784 self-regard is always a painful, uncertain process of taking three steps forward and two  
785 steps back. But the time will come when nearly every day of the week is one when you  
786 can say "Hey! I'm O.K. I'm me!"

787

## 788 **One day at a time**

789 Most of us have tried, in the past, to quit using drugs. Whenever a crisis occurred  
790 which was obviously created by our using, we would swear off, either for some fixed  
791 period of time or, more ambitiously, forever. Giving up drugs forever is exactly what  
792 the addict cannot face doing. In fact, to quit using and not being able to face a life  
793 without drugs are symptoms of drug addiction.

794 What solution does Narcotics Anonymous offer the recovering addict trapped in this  
795 dilemma? A very simple and effective one. We do not try to quit using drugs forever.  
796 We simply try to quit using today. One of the healing paradoxes one encounters so  
797 often in the program. "You have to surrender to win." "You can have something only  
798 if you let go of it" is another. If we manage to get through today without using drugs,  
799 tomorrow will take care of itself. There is a saying that the world's longest journey  
800 begins with one step. We view the path of recovery as being made up of small, easily-

801 handled individual steps. If you have not used a drug today, you are as surely on the  
802 road to recovery as someone who, in length of clean time, is far ahead of you. And  
803 furthermore, anyone can quit using drugs for one day.

804 It is not only the addict who can benefit from applying this principle to life. No one  
805 likes to think of a commitment that lasts forever, even the most ordinary ones. The  
806 thought of having to make one's bed every morning or to eat three meals a day, come  
807 rain or come shine, for the rest of one's life is unpleasant for anyone. All healthy people  
808 have learned to view their lives as centered in one day, today, the only day we can do  
809 anything about. One of our members recalls seeing on a signboard outside a church in  
810 Dayton, Ohio the following prayer, "... help me not to look back in anguish or  
811 forward in fear, but around in awareness." The idea behind this prayer is one all  
812 Narcotics Anonymous members should adopt as a supreme principle of living. It is the  
813 one great source of all that is constructive in our lives. Almost always, when we are  
814 emotionally stuck, depressed, anxious or afraid, it is because we have forgotten this  
815 vital principle. "A day at a time" is a basic rule for living.

816 One member recalls talking at a meeting about his fear of getting old. A woman  
817 replied, "I would be afraid of getting old, too. But there's no way I can seem to squeeze  
818 it into my day at a time program."

819 The "one day at a time" tool is particularly helpful in handling the craving for drugs or  
820 the symptoms of withdrawal from drugs that the newcomer faces. We need only  
821 handle the craving or discomfort for one day, today. We may need to break the day  
822 down into smaller units of time, depending on our level of distress: One hour, one-half  
823 an hour, ten minutes, and five minutes.

824 For addicts, who have great difficulty being in the moment, living in small time  
825 intervals can be an unfamiliar and baffling experience. But we can learn to do it. The  
826 following story as told by a member. "I got up in the morning craving a joint worse  
827 than I ever had before. I told myself, I will not smoke a joint for two hours. At the end  
828 of the two hours I told myself the same thing again. I went about the day as usual,

829 taking it in two hour intervals. The next thing I knew it was time to go to bed. I hadn't  
830 smoked that day."

831 Much in our lives and in our personalities that are unhealthy will benefit from the "one  
832 day at a time" rule. Such as trying to overcome other types of compulsive behavior,  
833 eating or gambling, working through a collapsing romance or enduring ongoing  
834 physical pain.

835 Sometimes the following prayer can be seen on the wall of a meeting room: "Take my  
836 will and my life. Guide me in my recovery. Show me how to live." Even the important  
837 matter of faith, faith in ourselves, faith in the program, faith in God, can be handled on  
838 a daily basis.

839 Just as important, living a day at a time gives us a heightened appreciation of the many  
840 good things that come to us in recovery. To surrender ourselves to the pleasures and  
841 rewards of life's good moments was something we never learned to do. We were  
842 always dwelling on the doom and gloom ahead. The next time you are doing  
843 something you really enjoy, whether it's going to a movie or camping or dancing or  
844 spending an evening with friends, try to keep yourself in the here and now. At such  
845 times you may find your mind wandering off into obscure worries about the future.  
846 But when this happens, you must pull yourself back into the present. With practice,  
847 living in the now gets easier. It brings a profound awareness of the benefits of staying  
848 clean.

849

## 850 **What to do about the craving**

851 When some of us come into Narcotics Anonymous we immediately lose the desire to  
852 take drugs. For others, early days in the program are an on-going battle with the  
853 craving to use. Most of us take a place between these two extremes. Normally we don't  
854 think of using, but when our thinking gets confused, when we become angry, resentful,  
855 or self-pitying, or when we wander too close to our Game, the desire to use drugs may

856 hit us. The intensity of the desire may vary all the way from a mild curiosity to a heart-  
857 pounding hunger. We usually crave our drugs of choice, but occasionally we have a  
858 craving for a drug we have never used. We may become momentarily fascinated by the  
859 rituals associated with a strange drug and see them as an escape from our situation. For  
860 example, a pill addict may think of shooting drugs. Trying to handle a broken romance  
861 usually presents us with the severest cravings of all, since we tend to use the romantic  
862 involvements themselves as a sort of drug.

863 Often we regard the craving for drugs as something foreign to us and unwelcome,  
864 somewhat like possession by demons. However, when you think about it, what could  
865 be more natural than a drug addict craving drugs? The fact that we react in such a  
866 frightening way to the craving means that once again we have become threatened by  
867 our feelings and are frantically looking for a way to control them. It's a good rule of  
868 thumb, though, that we feel the way we're supposed to feel, given our situation. In this,  
869 as in other predicaments, you should try to trust your basic functions.

870 Obviously, we members of Narcotics Anonymous have survived many such cravings;  
871 we are clean today, and, perhaps we are stronger and more self-reliant because of them.  
872 We may value our recovery more, since we generally don't put too much value in  
873 things that come easily.

874 However, we have found a number of techniques that are useful for handling the  
875 craving for drugs. Not all these suggestions apply to every situation; you should  
876 familiarize yourself with them so you can use them in those situations in which they are  
877 appropriate.

878 1) If you are in a situation where your recovery is threatened, get out! You  
879 should not be around drugs, or around fellow players of your Game: They  
880 don't have your best interest in mind. Why you got into such a situation  
881 isn't important now. You can discuss that later with your sponsor. What is  
882 important is to leave.

- 883           2)       Call your sponsor. You need another human to talk to, one who loves you,  
884                       who does have your best interest in mind. That's what your sponsor's  
885                       there for.
- 886           3)       Eat something, preferably a nutritious snack, for instance, a high protein  
887                       food. We often crave drugs at moments when our blood sugar is low,  
888                       usually in the late afternoon. In our addiction we conditioned ourselves to  
889                       take drugs to provide that kick the energy that food would have given us.  
890                       To most of us, the idea of using drugs after eating is less appealing. If you  
891                       have an eating disorder, you should exercise discretion, of course. Talk  
892                       with your sponsor about it.
- 893           4)       Use the one-day-at -a-time idea, or break it down even further.
- 894           5)       Say the Serenity Prayer. Also use any other prayers you can think of. "God,  
895                       relieve me of this obsession." Since the mind can accommodate only a  
896                       single thought, if you're praying, you won't be thinking about getting high.
- 897           6)       Try to accept the way you feel. Given your situation, your feelings are  
898                       inevitable. As we continue in our recovery, our cravings for drugs get  
899                       further apart and weaker in intensity. Most of our members seldom crave  
900                       drugs. We have a saying, "Leave drugs alone and they'll leave you alone."
- 901           7)       Talk about it at a meeting. The discussion part of meetings often opens  
902                       with the chairman asking, "Did anyone think of using today?" Jump right  
903                       in there: No one is going to judge you. If your story is particularly hair-  
904                       raising, it may make for a good meeting. And few people end up using  
905                       who go to a meeting and talk about it.
- 906           8)       As in everything else that happens to you, remember that you are worthy  
907                       and that you are no longer alone.

908    If you are craving drugs regularly; perhaps using another tool of the program would be  
909    helpful. You may be staying too close to your Game, or persistently doing something

910 to keep yourself screwed up mentally, physically or spiritually. Make an appointment  
911 with your sponsor, sit down and review your lifestyle openly and freely. Your sponsor  
912 may be able to spot a problem when you can't, and determine that you are engaged in  
913 some ongoing self-willed behavior, a personal vendetta, or a holy cause. A few of us  
914 found our craving for drugs went away when we decided to stop stealing. Narcotics  
915 Anonymous isn't particularly interested in taking a rigid moral stand on stealing. We are  
916 convinced, however, that stealing is very bad for addicts. We may tell ourselves we steal  
917 because we need the money. Of course, it's a lie. Stealing is a way we get over on  
918 people. It's secretive, it gives us a sense of power, it's exciting, and it gives us the thrill  
919 of being outside the law. In short, it is playing the Game. Stealing is as close to the  
920 Game as we can get without using. For the addict who wants to get comfortable with  
921 himself, any kind of systematic dishonesty has to go.

922 Some of the other ways we can provoke our craving for drugs on an ongoing basis is  
923 summed up in the expression, HALT, which stands for the phrase: "Never get too  
924 Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired."

925 We may skip meals (for the recovering addict, these amounts to self-destruction). We  
926 may harbor an ongoing resentment. We may have become isolated from others,  
927 particularly people in the program. We may not be getting sufficient sleep. All of these  
928 things endanger our recovery.

929

## 930 **Medical Marijuana**

931 Medical marijuana has reached a point in society where it is socially accepted and legal  
932 in many states. The ability to obtain a medical marijuana card is simply a formality.  
933 However, weed is a drug. We are people who suffer from the disease of addiction and  
934 must abstain from all drugs in order to recover.

935 Unfortunately for addicts, society is currently pushing marijuana, as though it is the  
936 cure-all of medicine. Yes, the evidence is growing as to the medical benefits of

937 marijuana. Some are the use of CBD oil, with or without THC, to help with certain  
938 medical conditions. We must remember, simply because a drug has medical benefits,  
939 and can be prescribed by a doctor, does not mean we have to take it. NA is a program  
940 of complete abstinence from all mind altering, mood changing chemicals. We addicts  
941 have the ability to justify the most ridiculous reasons for participating in self-destructive  
942 behavior. For example, if we are having a problem sleeping, perhaps we justify  
943 smoking a joint. This is not the full story. For addicts, the benefits do not outweigh the  
944 risks. If we are having a problem sleeping, so what... we don't sleep. No one ever  
945 died from lack of sleep.

946 Ingesting marijuana places us in a position to not deal with life, and not deal with our  
947 feelings. Part of active addiction is not dealing with life on life's terms. If we are  
948 smoking weed, we are not dealing with our feelings. If life is tough, we can either  
949 smoke a joint or deal with what is rough about it. This is what we must learn to do in  
950 recovery. We must learn to deal with life, and we cannot successfully do that stoned.

951 The program of Narcotics Anonymous is simple. The process is hard, especially at the  
952 beginning, but we can get and stay clean together. Many of us have discovered that  
953 after a few weeks of no weed that one day we wake up and can see change. Colors are  
954 brighter, we feel more alive, like the fog has lifted. Those first two weeks are hardest  
955 because we're not high and we are feeling things that we numbed by getting high. Life  
956 is now genuine and we're not trying to escape. Please, give yourself a break and try this  
957 way of life. We have found the rewards of complete abstinence from all mind altering,  
958 mood changing drugs to be worth the effort. We feel, touch, taste, hear, smell, see, and  
959 live life fuller now. We are out of the fog.

960 The substitution of marijuana has caused a great many addicts to form a new addiction  
961 pattern, which in its progression brings as many problems as before. We seem to forget  
962 that weed is still a drug. It would appear that we are people with addictive personalities  
963 who are strongly susceptible to marijuana addiction. Whether it is self-prescribed, or  
964 prescribed by a well-meaning, but uninformed physician, our recovery is our  
965 responsibility. Weed is a drug.

966

## 967 **Sponsorship**

968 When talking to a newcomer, most people in the program emphasize three things:  
969 “Don’t use. Go to meetings. Get a sponsor.” The first two are self-explanatory. But  
970 what is a sponsor? What does he or she do?

971 A sponsor is an experienced member of the program who will act as a guide in your  
972 new life and whose counsel will help you to avoid some of the pitfalls reality holds for  
973 the recovering addict. Experience is essential in a sponsor. If they are to help you to  
974 avoid traps, they should have traveled the path before you. However, no rule can be  
975 laid down about the amount of clean time your sponsor should have. Some members  
976 of the program cannot function as sponsors no matter how long they have been clean.  
977 Others can build a good working relationship with the sponsee after less than a year’s  
978 recovery time. Whether a member can be a good sponsor is not entirely dependent on  
979 the quality of recovery, but rather on the person’s talent for sponsorship. All of us  
980 know of instances of sponsors whose lives are in disarray, and yet whose advice to  
981 those they sponsor is solid, comprehensive, and capable of being easily understood and  
982 acted on. We all have feet of clay.

983 If we find ourselves unwilling to get a sponsor, it is a warning we are on dangerous  
984 ground. It is often a sign that we have some destructive behavior we want to protect.  
985 Some examples are DRT, MAT, MAR, stealing on the job, or compulsive sexual  
986 activity. A sponsor will assist us to examine our behavior, which is exactly what we  
987 want to avoid. Moreover, failing to get a sponsor is a way of staying uncommitted to  
988 the program, or staying on the fence, so to speak. Most of us harbor a great deal of  
989 mixed feelings about our recovery; we want all the pain to go away but not all the  
990 highs. We imagine that by masterminding our own recovery and doing things our own  
991 way we can choose what we want from both worlds, from staying clean or from using.  
992 This way does not work. We come only to experience the terrible pain of not  
993 belonging anywhere. Our using friends feel uncomfortable around us and the people in



994 the program can't reach us through our protective shield. There is a way out of this  
995 painful dilemma. Ask yourself, if your way was so good, what are you doing in  
996 Narcotics Anonymous?

997 You alone must be the judge of the quality of your prospective sponsor's recovery. It is  
998 one of the continuing miracles of the program that the right sponsor usually finds the  
999 right person. But we can offer you some practical advice based on our experience.

1000 First, if you are a man, get a male sponsor. If you are a woman, get a female sponsor.  
1001 The opportunities for manipulation, role playing, destructive romance, and sexual  
1002 adventuring are too great in mixed sponsorships. We have almost never seen them  
1003 work out. If a sponsor is chosen because of physical qualities, the result is always a  
1004 disaster. How can you get the possible life-saving guidance you need if you're sexual  
1005 attracted to your sponsor. It's somewhat like walking down the street; picking out the  
1006 most attractive person you meet and saying "Will you do my appendectomy for me?"  
1007 Getting laid is only a temporary fix. Staying clean is a lifesaving endeavor.

1008 For those of our members who are gay or lesbian, we believe it is best to choose a gay  
1009 or lesbian sponsor. It's not that any other Narcotics Anonymous member would lack  
1010 the necessary understanding, but we have found that problems of gay guilt can be most  
1011 carefully worked out with a gay sponsor.

1012 Secondly, don't be too hasty in choosing a sponsor. Attend meetings and pay particular  
1013 attention to the members who seem to be speaking to your condition, the ones who,  
1014 from what they say before or in conversations after meetings, seem to understand what  
1015 you are going through. Charm, robust humor, and a talent for telling clever using  
1016 stories may be false virtues. Do you pick a doctor because they tell good jokes? Above  
1017 all, the sponsor should be deadly serious when they talks about the program. They  
1018 should make it clear to you that they believes working the program on a pick and  
1019 choose basis is not acceptable, a step here, a meeting there. When you ask them to be  
1020 your sponsor, you may well hear something like "Okay. I expect you to do certain  
1021 things. Go to ninety meetings in ninety days. Call me every day. Then we'll start  
1022 looking at the steps." About this time you may feel your stomach sinking. "What have

1023 I gotten myself into?” Relax. If you have such a sponsor, you’re on your way to getting  
1024 better.

1025 Thirdly, once you have a sponsor, use them! They will probably give you telephone  
1026 numbers where they can be reached both day and night, and they will expect you to  
1027 contact them on a regular basis. It is highly unlikely that you can over-use your sponsor  
1028 in your first year of recovery. Don’t worry about whether you are pestering them. We  
1029 stay clean by helping the newcomer. Never do your sponsor’s thinking for them. If  
1030 you need to call them, then call them. They can make the choice as to whether or not  
1031 to answer the phone. Your job is to call.

1032 A member of the program recently described the difference between the way a newly  
1033 recovering addict and an ordinary person deal with the crisis of a flat tire. The  
1034 Narcotics Anonymous member complicates the situation while the ordinary person  
1035 fixes the tire.

1036 A sponsor is there not only to advise you but also to listen. For many of the growing  
1037 pains we experience in staying clean, the only solution is a willing listener. The idea that  
1038 every human problem has a clear cut solution is a false idea that is prevalent in a  
1039 society. An old saying is, a problem shared is a problem halved. The point of the  
1040 anecdote about the flat tire is that although you will eventually have to repair your tire  
1041 and you certainly can’t expect your sponsor to do it, what you need now is  
1042 encouragement. We need someone to keep us in the solution, not the problem.

1043 On the other hand, your sponsor may give you specific advice, particularly about  
1044 program matters. Try to be open to their experience. Try to act against the negativity  
1045 that has infected your whole life, the feeling we always get that “This isn’t going to do  
1046 any good.” It certainly won’t do any good if you don’t do it! Most of the “solutions”  
1047 we so eagerly embraced in the past turned out to be problems instead. Remember,  
1048 feelings are not facts, and it is not necessary for you to believe something is going to  
1049 work for it to work. Prayer is a good example.

1050 The person you ask to sponsor you may turn you down. Don't be discouraged. It in no  
1051 way reflects your qualities as a person or your suitability for the program. Program  
1052 members who end up sponsoring too many newcomers find that their own needs are  
1053 not being met. If someone tells you this, they have done you a favor. Keep looking,  
1054 you will find the sponsor intended for you.

1055 Should you have more than one sponsor? No. If we find ourselves going to two or  
1056 more people for advice we are probably looking for the advice that will agree with what  
1057 we already want to do. Being responsible to one person is a way of safeguarding  
1058 ourselves from our manipulative natures.

1059 After choosing a sponsor, if you allow it, they can be invaluable to your growth in the  
1060 program. In many of the sections of this book, a recurring piece of advice is, "Talk  
1061 with your sponsor about this." A sponsor is the way we keep our feet on the ground  
1062 and avoid becoming the victim of our own schemes and hasty actions.

1063 Though you will find your sponsor's help invaluable, you should be aware of the  
1064 limitations of sponsorship. Your sponsor is not Superhero, a counselor or psychologist,  
1065 a social caseworker, a lending agency, a doctor, a marriage advisor, or a lawyer. Your  
1066 sponsor is a recovering addict, just as you are, who is a little further down the road than  
1067 you. The word "mentor" describes, perhaps, the role better than any other. The word  
1068 derives from the same Greek word. Mentor was Odysseus' trusted and faithful friend.  
1069 The operative word is "trusted." Trust is an essential ingredient in your relationship  
1070 with your sponsor. You must be able to confide in your sponsor. Thoughts, feelings,  
1071 past actions you have always hesitated to tell anyone else about; you must be able to  
1072 share with your sponsor who will understand the privileged nature of what you say.  
1073 Whatever you tell your sponsor is classified in program language as Fifth Step material.  
1074 It is for this reason that your relationship with your sponsor promotes your sponsor's  
1075 growth. It is a sign of our maturity when we can keep confidences and forego the  
1076 attention and the cheap thrills that indulging in gossip give us.

1077 There is, generally, a trial period in which you and your sponsor feel each other out,  
1078 just as a new swimmer tests out the water. During your first meetings you will be

1079 embarrassed, nervous, and eager for your sponsor to like you. However, you will  
1080 quickly find yourself working into a routine in which your conversations are more  
1081 spontaneous and relaxed.

1082 As your relationship grows, your sponsor will develop a sixth sense about you as a  
1083 person, knowing when you need a listener and when you need advice. They can sense  
1084 when you're unhappy or when you're in difficulty. Soon you will probably spend an  
1085 evening with your sponsor without dwelling on your problems. When this happens,  
1086 your sponsor is becoming more than a sponsor; they are becoming a valued asset to  
1087 your recovery.

1088 At times you may find yourself critical of the things your sponsor does or says. You  
1089 may occasionally detect an apparent insensitivity to your problems or impatience with  
1090 your progress. You're discovering your sponsor is a human being, a struggling addict  
1091 trying, like you, to get well. If you are like most of us, you may find a friendship  
1092 emerging out of your relationship with your sponsor. A real friendship, something you  
1093 may have never experienced. It is something worth fighting and struggling for. For the  
1094 program offers us a priceless gift: the ability to amend relationships, something quite  
1095 foreign to our using experience, where anger with a friend was a sufficient reason for  
1096 us to write the friendship off forever. If we are determined to become human, an  
1097 argument with a friend, even your sponsor, can be a blessing in disguise. Friendships,  
1098 like everything else, are not perfect.

1099 That is a great lesson you can learn from sponsorship, the lesson that you are both  
1100 human beings and that being human is good enough. The miraculous thing is that in all  
1101 our shortcomings and imperfections that make up the NA Fellowship, we can find  
1102 love, healing, and strength we need to live happy, joyous, and free.

1103

1104 Although it is very unlikely, something may happen to destroy the feeling of trust you  
1105 have for your sponsor. Along with your sponsor, you will have established other  
1106 relationships in the program which can support you if this happens. It may be

1107 necessary for you to choose another sponsor. It is important not to judge or fix blame.  
1108 You will grow if you can resist doing so. It is better to understand, rather than be  
1109 understood.

1110 All your major decisions and activities should be discussed with your sponsor: quitting  
1111 smoking, changing employment, making substantial expenditures, changing your  
1112 scheduled meetings, getting involved in new social activities, emotional involvements  
1113 to name a few. It is wise to always remember that a part of us is working against our  
1114 recovery. How often have we seen the newcomer inform the sponsor a week or so  
1115 after committing themselves to an expensive anti-smoking program, buying a vehicle,  
1116 or dropping certain meetings? When we act impulsively and secretively, our worst  
1117 nature is winning. Whenever we act first, and discuss it with our sponsors later, we are  
1118 keeping an important part unavailable to our program.

## 1119 **Prayer: It's a spiritual program**

1120 The newcomer has read the words “God” and “prayer” a number of times in this  
1121 book, and has undoubtedly heard them mentioned at meetings. We often use the  
1122 expression “my Higher Power,” or simply, “my H.P.” The expression comes from our  
1123 Second Step, “Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to  
1124 sanity.”

1125 The newcomer may have greeted these words with silent distaste and contempt, or  
1126 even with fear “Please don’t let this be a religious trip!” Was Narcotics Anonymous,  
1127 despite the evidence of recovery all around us, going to be just another blind alley?  
1128 Would we end up disillusioned and defeated once again saying “I was into Narcotics  
1129 Anonymous for two years,” the same way we had said “I was into meditation for two  
1130 years,” or “I was into group for two years?”

1131 That we were often hostile to religion and to God is an understatement. The only  
1132 persons we knew during our addictions who claimed to be in touch with any sort of  
1133 higher power were obviously crazy acid freaks or dust heads for example. Unkempt,  
1134 skeletal, wild-eyed, the objects of our and our fellow users’ contempt, they were usually

1135 shuttled off to the locked wards of mental institutions, never to be seen again. The  
1136 other prominent God-fearing people that we tend to be familiar with were the starched  
1137 and blue-faced fundamentalist preachers shouting from the Sunday TV screens.  
1138 Occasionally, some of us turned their programs on for laughs. Did Narcotics  
1139 Anonymous want us to become like any of these people?

1140 The more historically minded of us could build an impressive case against religions.  
1141 Look at some of the organized religions with the torture and murder of hundreds of  
1142 thousands of people, or the persecutions of witches in Salem. We delighted in pointing  
1143 out the hypocrisy of the Godly, the fundamentalist preacher accused of sexually  
1144 molesting young members of his flock or the chaplains of opposing armies who  
1145 piously assured their soldiers that God was on their side. Behind our attitudes about  
1146 religion and God there is a fear, a fear we would later recognize to be a central fear in  
1147 the addictive personality, the fear of loss of control. If we allowed God, even for a  
1148 moment, to enter our lives we would find ourselves a month later wearing a funny  
1149 cloak and beating a tambourine in front of City Hall, as a scraggly and unkempt as any  
1150 of the Jesus Freaks we had always looked down on. We would lose control.

1151 To begin with, let us assure you that Narcotics Anonymous does not want you to be  
1152 any person other than the person you can respect. In fact, it is not possible for us to be  
1153 a person who is driven, possessed, or for whom we have contempt, and still stay clean.  
1154 No reasonable program for living will make you into someone you cannot live with; it's  
1155 our addiction that did that.

1156 Concerning organized religion and the evils thereof, we can only point out that,  
1157 through human history, religion and spirituality have often had little to do with each  
1158 other. Religion is too frequently spirituality perverted. As steel can be used to make  
1159 guns, switchblade knives, and bombs, it can also be used to make scalpels, plows, and  
1160 iron lungs. It is our decision what to do with the raw substance of spirituality that will  
1161 make it good or bad for us. Narcotics Anonymous only wants you to be open-minded  
1162 about applying a universal set of spiritual principles to your daily life. They didn't  
1163 originate with us and they are very old. We will explore these principles in the chapter,

1164 “Getting into the steps.” Right now we request you to do very little, no more than you  
1165 can reasonably do.

1166 Why the emphasis on spirituality in the Narcotics Anonymous program? Wouldn't it  
1167 be better off without it, more “scientific?” Some therapists think so and the accusation  
1168 of “religiosity” is a way some people discredited Narcotics Anonymous, particularly  
1169 disgruntled addicts who have returned to using. “Oh, Narcotics Anonymous; I  
1170 couldn't go for all that God stuff.” However, very thoughtful persons other than  
1171 addicts have seen the connection between felt spiritual needs and addiction. A  
1172 psychologist once said that the alcoholic was trying to find God in a bottle. If they had  
1173 lived in our times, they would have said that the drug addict was trying to find God in a  
1174 drug. Some scientists have pointed out that, as our addiction progresses, many of us  
1175 begin to feel vague religious desires. We wish there was something out there with  
1176 which we could unite ourselves, something that could make us whole.

1177 At the start of our using we may have told ourselves boastfully “What idiot could  
1178 believe in God?” The point is, and then we already had a God: the packet, the pill, the  
1179 joint, the bottle. But as our addiction progressed, we came to find less getting high in  
1180 getting high, and our God seemed to have left us hanging. At this point something in  
1181 us wants a God that will work for us, rather than against us. These desires, if they  
1182 occur, are healthy: They mean there is a part of us that wants to get well.

1183 We think it is the lack of attention to the addict's spiritual needs that has spelled the  
1184 downfall of other therapies, either psychoanalysis, or the purely medical therapies such  
1185 as Medication Assisted Treatment (MATs), Drug Replacement Therapy (DRT),  
1186 Medically Assisted Recovery (MAR), or other therapies that are insufficient for us.  
1187 Such approaches can't satisfy the spiritual hunger we feel. It's unfortunate because  
1188 many psychiatrists and counselors have spoken of the addict's need for a spiritual basis  
1189 for living.

1190 One new member recalls a wise piece of advice from their sponsor, “If you want to  
1191 grow spiritually you should forget all you've heard about God and religion.” Perhaps  
1192 Narcotics Anonymous can be thought of as a do-it-yourself God kit. We discover, as

1193 we stay clean, a loving God who provides us with the strength to continue to stay  
1194 clean. Acquiring a God which can give us direction and stability, rather than the curses  
1195 of guilt and emotional pain, is one of the greatest rewards of the program. It has been  
1196 our experience that Narcotics Anonymous members need Higher Power and they  
1197 need people. We can only find one through the other.

1198 What do we expect you to do? At the start, we expect very little. It isn't necessary for  
1199 you to define the word "God" to use them. That may take the rest of your life, nor is it  
1200 necessary for you to believe they will work. Perhaps you can believe that we believe  
1201 prayers work. It isn't about understanding how it works, it's just believing that it will  
1202 work. After all, it isn't necessary for you to believe the lights will go on when you flip  
1203 the switch for it to happen. We would like you to begin by using three small prayers.

1204 1) Start each day with the prayer, "God, help me to stay clean today."

1205 This prayer centers us for the day. It reminds us we are recovering addicts and  
1206 our priority it to stay clean. We are not alone in a hostile universe. There are  
1207 sources of help outside of us. Our recovery does not have to be our own  
1208 project.

1209 2) During the day if you are confronted with a difficult living problem, the  
1210 craving for a drug or any painful emotion, you will find the Serenity Prayer  
1211 helpful:

1212 *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to*  
1213 *change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

1214 3) At night, before going to bed, say "God, thank you for keeping me clean  
1215 today."

1216 This reminds us to be grateful. That no matter what else happened, if we didn't  
1217 use, the day was a success. We stayed clean, just for today. That was all we had  
1218 to do, and we did it. The day may have been a good one, full of successes and



1219           accomplishments, or a rotten one, we were angry and afraid and hassled by  
1220           one failure after another. These things are simply not important. This day was a  
1221           success: We stayed clean.

1222       As much as the help these prayers will give us, we need the self-discipline of uttering  
1223       them. We need to be reminded that we can do simple things, act on our own needs,  
1224       and take direction. We no longer have to be our own worst enemies.

1225

## 1226       **Doing everything overnight.**

1227       Addicts are impatient people: impatient to make the connection, impatient to take the  
1228       dope, impatient with the quality of the high. It has often been remarked that one can  
1229       pick addicts out from among ordinary people just by noticing how rapidly they  
1230       consume even harmless beverages like sodas and coffee. This impatience, which, of  
1231       course, carries over into our recovery, is one of the greatest enemies of our growth and  
1232       our stability.

1233       Sometimes this impatience shows itself in the way we establish unrealistic goals. Once  
1234       we get our feet on the ground we find dozens of things consuming as much of our  
1235       energy as building our recovery and working on ourselves. Suddenly it is desperately  
1236       important that we repair a long damaged relationship, return to school, get a better car,  
1237       job, or quit smoking. Even our recovery is the object of our impatience: We want five  
1238       years of being clean overnight, or at the least, we spend a great deal of time fantasizing  
1239       about the profound wisdom we will spread among an admiring fellowship with our  
1240       first anniversary talk.

1241       As a recovering addict your first commitment should be to the program. You should  
1242       avoid making major decisions and changes too early in your recovery. The new  
1243       member, during his or her first year or so, should not try to do too much more than  
1244       stay clean. Most important changes must take place within us, and the fact is that unless  
1245       we put our recovery first in any and every situation, we will never be able to get or hold

1246 onto those things we would put before it. Engaging in causes and ill-advised grandiose  
1247 projects has spelled tragedy for too many of us. At this point we must leave great  
1248 schemes and the management of the world to those better equipped to handle them.  
1249 Remember where you came from--the accidents, hospitals, jails, overdoses, the  
1250 nightmares and terrors--and compare that with where you are today. This mental  
1251 exercise can always help us to relax any unrealistic demands we have on life.

1252 One common mistake the newcomer, who is not already a fulltime student, makes is  
1253 returning to school too soon. We may fall into the unfortunate habit of comparing  
1254 ourselves with those we went to high school or college with but who didn't become  
1255 addicts. They graduated, we didn't. Their lives are orderly and, apparently, successful;  
1256 ours are chaotic and screwed up. Suddenly we find it terribly important to get that lost  
1257 high school diploma or college degree and to do it as quickly as possible. We want to  
1258 make up for lost time. We may run to the nearest community college, register for a full  
1259 load of courses in night school, purchase large quantities of books and supplies, and  
1260 study frantically for two or three weeks. Meetings and program contacts take the back  
1261 seat in this rush program for self-improvement. What we find is that we simply cannot  
1262 cut it. We have not developed the habits of patience, perseverance and self-discipline  
1263 that a successful program of study while working fulltime requires. Hurt and  
1264 disillusioned, we end up dropping out of school once again. If we are lucky, we escape  
1265 with our recovery intact.

1266 Program members tend to make excellent students, when they take up a judiciously  
1267 chosen program of study at the proper time in their recovery. They are often articulate,  
1268 insightful about human problems and conditions, and energetic. Their experiences in  
1269 the program have given them a maturity, compassion and view of the world that the  
1270 ordinary student may well lack. But the readiness must come with time, it can't be  
1271 forced. This is another instance of where merely staying clean and working the  
1272 Narcotics Anonymous program will prepare us to accomplish seemingly unrelated  
1273 activities in the future. Remember that not many things of lasting value can be done  
1274 quickly.

1275 If you work fulltime, we suggest as a rule of thumb, that you wait until you have  
1276 accumulate some clean time before you return to school. You should also discuss your  
1277 plans thoroughly with your sponsor to avoid making impulsive decisions and  
1278 committing yourself to a program of study you may not be able to carry out. You  
1279 should start out small. We don't want to create anymore unmanageability by being  
1280 overwhelmed. In addition to leaning the course material, many of us had to develop  
1281 study habits, time management, and social skills. These additional challenges add stress.  
1282 Contact with those in the program who have returned to school successfully is  
1283 important. Why repeat the mistakes of others? Why not learn from their successes.

1284 Inability to find a job or to get the right job is another source of dissatisfaction to many  
1285 new members. The point is that a clean addict without a job is better off than the using  
1286 addict with a job. What work you are doing, as long as it pays the bills and the working  
1287 environment doesn't threaten your recovery, is not important. If you are working in an  
1288 environment that threatens your recovery, you may wish to reconsider that.  
1289 Consulting with your sponsor may help you to see things in a different light.

1290 You can work a boring job, even among people that are difficult, and stay clean. An  
1291 unsatisfactory working environment offers us many opportunities to come to terms  
1292 with ourselves, and with others. Tolerance, compassion, and putting oneself in the  
1293 other person's shoes aren't qualities that can be learned in a vacuum. The workplace is  
1294 one of the best proving grounds for program principles. Many of us discovered that  
1295 our attitude towards our coworkers improved the longer we stayed clean.

1296 When is the right time to seek a better job? Most of us have discovered the right job  
1297 comes along when we are ready for it. In our recovery we meet many people inside and  
1298 outside the program. Often the people we meet notice the personal qualities the  
1299 program has brought into our lives. They may be impressed by our even-  
1300 temperedness, our maturity, our insight. Very often these personal contacts result in  
1301 job offers. No area of our recovery is as full of strange coincidences and little miracles.  
1302 In our working lives, as well as in so many other areas of our recovery, it is good to  
1303 bear in mind the saying: "When the student is ready, the teacher will arrive."

1304 The pursuit of materialist things, kayak, car, house, clothing, or motorcycle, is another  
1305 way we can sabotage our recovery. There is nothing inherently wrong with having nice  
1306 things. Buying something for ourselves can be one of the rewards of the program. Like  
1307 so many other issues the true solution here lies in moderation. The stress of acquiring a  
1308 possession that we are not yet ready for can make us feel like using. There is the feeling  
1309 of stimulation that ownership gives followed by the sense of being cheated after we tire  
1310 of the toy. In other words, we're saddled with exactly the same set of feelings that  
1311 caused us to search for a more lasting and powerful high. Often, in the grip of retail  
1312 therapy, we buy yet something else and see, in horror, a whole new pattern of  
1313 compulsive behavior begin to emerge in us. We find ourselves spending to change our  
1314 moods.

1315 One newcomer impatiently asked their sponsor, "When will I be ready for a new car?"  
1316 Their sponsor replied, "When you no longer want it so much."

1317 There is much to be said for that answer. Addicts don't make very good materialists.  
1318 We need God and we need people. Material possessions don't have much to do with  
1319 either. Our real problems don't stem from the things we lack, but from what we are or  
1320 aren't as human beings. Our true talents are for working with and helping other people.  
1321 This helps to develop our potential and seek growth. That's why a sense of betrayal  
1322 eventually accompanies compulsive spending.

1323 The program will give us the power we need when we need it. That Power, whose  
1324 immense concern and love gave us the miraculous gift of recovery, will not deny us  
1325 food when we are hungry, a place to sleep, or the comfort of human contact. An  
1326 overabundant concern with material possessions cuts us off from this source of help,  
1327 and is the cause of much of our unhappiness.

## 1328 **Medication Assisted Treatment**

1329 Narcotics Anonymous is a program of complete abstinence from all mind-altering,  
1330 mood-changing drugs based on spiritual principles. Because the program of Narcotics  
1331 Anonymous works, we view Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), Drug

1332 Replacement Therapy (DRT), and Medically Assisted Recovery (MAR) programs  
1333 detrimental to the recovery process. Despite the good intentions and compassion often  
1334 to be found in the persons administering the programs, we think that the existence of  
1335 MAT/DRT/MAR centers reflects the cynical view society often has of addicts. The  
1336 programs are, in fact, a way of warehousing addicts. “You can do what you want to  
1337 with them as long as they don’t steal our stuff” seems to be the message.

1338 A major benchmark for success in these programs is that the addict can keep a job.  
1339 NA is more concerned about the quality of the addict’s life. Do they have any real  
1340 hope? Do they grow emotionally and spiritually? Do they ever acquire the ability to  
1341 give themselves to others? For the addict who are taking drugs to get off of drugs, the  
1342 answer is “no” to all these questions. Like it or not, these drugs are addictive. We know  
1343 any addict taking such a drug will make the drug the center of their life. Will they give  
1344 them as much as they want? Will they get to the clinic on time? Will their urine sample  
1345 reveal the presence of a pill they took two hours earlier? “I was obsessed with the idea  
1346 that I would catch the wrong bus,” one ex-MAT user says. “I knew I would get sick as  
1347 hell if I ended up in Atlantic City.”

1348 Anyone who has been in one of these drug replacement programs know that the  
1349 centers are the most active coping places in town. The personnel running such  
1350 centers, whether they are trying to control drug trading, control the addict, or  
1351 eliminating illicit drug use, they are really in a losing position. They are trying to beat the  
1352 addict at their own game by creating the illusion of a clean addict.

1353 Ultimately, however, it is the addict who loses. They are trapped in a dependent role in  
1354 one of the toughest games of all.

1355 Many of us were in drug replacement therapy at one time. We are now free of all drugs.  
1356 We think the word “free” has a beautiful sound to it. If you are now in a drug  
1357 replacement program, keep coming to our meetings. Talk to us and listen to what we  
1358 have to say. What we have done, you can do.

1359

## 1360 **Being assertive**

1361 How often have you found yourself saying yes when you wanted to say no? Or  
1362 suffering a bad meal in a restaurant or sloppy service in a store and saying nothing?

1363 Addicts, perhaps more than others, find it difficult to communicate their feelings and  
1364 define their space to other people. Addicts have spent their lives mastering the fine art  
1365 of people pleasing. Occasionally we tried to please others in order to get something we  
1366 wanted, but that wasn't usually the reason. We didn't really like ourselves very much,  
1367 and that's why it was so important that others liked us. Isolated and always feeling on  
1368 the outside of any group, we wouldn't feel so lonely; then we would feel we belonged.

1369 If we are to stay clean, this life-long habit of people pleasing must come to a halt. There  
1370 are times when our very survival depends on our ability to say no: "No, I don't use," or  
1371 "No, I don't want a drink." It's something none of us are very good at to start with, but  
1372 just like anything else, it gets easier with practice.

1373 Defining your own space, letting others know your wants, needs and feelings are  
1374 referred to as being assertive. It's not being aggressive; that means violating the rights  
1375 of others. Being assertive means asserting your own rights. It is an essential part of our  
1376 recovery. We are no longer anyone else's doormat.

1377 What are some of our rights? Among others:

1378 1) We have the right to ask a question. How many times have we accepted an  
1379 explanation from someone else when we didn't really understand it?

1380 2) We have the right to say "your behavior, or this situation, makes me  
1381 uncomfortable."

1382 3) We have the right to change our mind.

1383 4) We have the right to say, "I don't know."

1384 5) "No", is a complete sentence. We don't have to always explain everything.



1414 feelings. Anyone who seems to be pleading a special cause by getting you to take a  
1415 drink may have a problem. You may see that person at a meeting soon.

1416 You might ask yourself how you would handle the two following situations:

1417 1) You are looking forward eagerly to your first date with a person to whom  
1418 you're very attracted. You very much want everything to go right. On  
1419 getting in the car the person lights up a joint.

1420 2) A person from your using past calls you, knowing you have a spare room.  
1421 He or she wants to stay with you "until I can get on my feet."

1422 Of course, handling such situations is not easy. However, learning to be assertive in  
1423 little situations in restaurants, stores, and with strangers makes it easier to be assertive in  
1424 important situations. There are many useful popular books available. We recommend  
1425 them. Above all, in situations such as the above which may constitute a threat to your  
1426 recovery; get in touch as soon as possible with someone in the program. Their clear-  
1427 sightedness and objectivity may give you the courage to say, "Look, it bothers me  
1428 when someone smokes around me," or "It's not convenient for me to let you stay  
1429 here."

1430

## 1431 **Alcohol vs. addiction**

1432 Sometimes a new member in the program holds onto the idea that they can drink  
1433 alcoholic beverages safely. To experienced members of Narcotics Anonymous, that is  
1434 not living clean. Alcohol is a drug, a depressant, chemically similar; in fact, to the  
1435 solvents used in glue-substances any of us will admit have the potential for grave  
1436 addiction. To the new member who says, "But I'm not an alcoholic!" we reply, "You'd  
1437 better get used to the sound of the word. You just haven't drunk enough yet." Just as  
1438 we abused pills or other drugs, we will abuse alcohol.



1439 The tragic spectacle of the drug addict who discovers the new drug alcohol is very  
1440 familiar to us. Why should the new member of Narcotics Anonymous expose  
1441 themselves to such suffering? One way or another alcohol will be taken from our lives,  
1442 and the best time to get alcohol out of our lives is now.

1443 Those of us unwilling to give up alcohol do so, we think, for two reasons. First, alcohol  
1444 is a unique drug, a drug whose use is socially reinforced and rewarded. The fact that it  
1445 forms the basis of comforting social rituals; weddings, cocktail hours, parties, makes us  
1446 think of alcohol as necessary for normal living. The recovering addict with their  
1447 damaged sense of self and their tendency to define themselves by the way others see  
1448 them, may think of alcoholic beverages as something that will restore them to  
1449 normalcy or make them part of the crowd. Secondly, using alcohol is a way the addict  
1450 can express their rebellion toward the program and their own recovery. “This I will not  
1451 give up!” Each of us holds onto certain things, and will give them up only when it  
1452 becomes overwhelmingly clear that they are damaging our lives as much as our  
1453 addiction did. The new member will find alcohol an evil ally. As long as they continue  
1454 use, they will not grow, change, and improve in their ability to make human contact, or  
1455 be of use to others. In fact, they are outside the program.

1456 Occasionally a new member may find themselves in the hands of a therapist who want  
1457 to make a social drinker of them. “I want to make you free!” the therapist may say. The  
1458 therapist, who would recoil at the idea of the addict using an illicit drug socially, is  
1459 promoting the social use of a drug which is an even graver national health problem.  
1460 We may have believed we were free agents during our addiction but our freedom  
1461 consisted mostly of destruction on ourselves and those around us. In recovery we find  
1462 that responsibility is not opposed to freedom, but is an essential part of it. If you hear  
1463 such a message from a therapist or anyone else use it as an opportunity to be assertive.  
1464 Point out that you think it is total nonsense. The quality of our lives is determined by  
1465 our love for ourselves and others, not by the chemical substances we use.

1466

1467 **I'll never sleep again**

1468 Let's say you've been clean a week. It's 3:30 in the morning. You've been tossing and  
1469 turning, unable to sleep, vague fears and feelings of eeriness plague you. The once  
1470 familiar and comfortable room now seems strange. You sit up on the edge of the bed,  
1471 your heart pounding. What can you do? Call your sponsor? That seems silly and  
1472 besides you wouldn't want to wake them. "I'll never get to sleep," you may be thinking.  
1473 "I'll go crazy."

1474 Difficulty in sleeping is something almost everyone in the program has experienced.  
1475 Yet, talk to anyone who has been clean any length of time and the member will usually  
1476 single out the ability to get a good night's sleep as one of the greatest rewards of the  
1477 program. What's happening here? Just how does the program help us to overcome  
1478 insomnia?

1479 Our many years' experience has made clear some important and unusual facts about  
1480 sleep and insomnia. One of these is that what your feelings are telling you when you  
1481 think you can't get to sleep--either about how much sleep you are actually getting or  
1482 about the danger of going without sleep--are lies. In fact, there are two very helpful  
1483 sayings in the program that illustrate this. One is, "No one ever died from lack--of  
1484 sleep." The other is, "You will get as much sleep as you need and more than you think  
1485 you do." We can add one more thing: "For the newly recovering addict, not sleeping is  
1486 pretty normal."

1487 For years we have flooded our nervous systems with all sorts of mood changers. Our  
1488 nervous systems are not yet comfortable in a drug free environment; as they adjust to  
1489 being clean our ability to get a good night's sleep will increase. Sleeplessness is one of  
1490 those problems for which staying clean alone are usually the answer.

1491 Concerning the second saying, we point out that we are usually poor judges of how  
1492 much sleep we get. Sometimes we think we have been able to sleep, but then are able  
1493 to spot specific dreams. One morning a member complained of spending a sleepless  
1494 night, and his wife played for him a cassette recording of his snoring. "You got enough

1495 sleep to keep me awake,” she said. Usually our bodies are wiser than our minds. We do  
1496 get the sleep we need, not as much as we want perhaps, but what we need.

1497 All this may be little consolation to you at 3:30 in the morning. For us, insomnia usually  
1498 consists of the fearful anticipation of not sleeping. What can you do when you’re  
1499 actually experiencing insomnia?

1500 There is a saying, attributed to the Buddha: “Don’t just do something. Stand there.”  
1501 Much of what we have to say about sleep is this sort of advice.

1502 First, don’t take a pill. If you have such pills around, it doesn’t speak well for your  
1503 recovery. Not only would their effect on your recovery be very questionable, but recent  
1504 medical studies show sleeping pills are a cheat. They probably don’t give you the kind  
1505 of sleep you need. It’s known as REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Better two hours of  
1506 the right kind of sleep than eight hours of the wrong kind.

1507 Second, don’t try to sleep. Sleeping is one of the items on that long list of things that  
1508 the addict cannot change by willpower alone. The more you fight sleeplessness, the  
1509 bigger it gets. Try to lie still. A lot of frantic muscular activity, jumping around, slugging  
1510 down quantities of warm milk, playing solitaire, are ways of processing your  
1511 sleeplessness are not helping. Try doing some deep breathing and relaxing to get a little  
1512 rest. You may tell yourself you don’t want to sleep, only to rest. Relaxation audios and  
1513 exercises are commonly available. The newcomer may find these suggestions useful.

1514 The following two stories are fairly typical of our experiences.

1515 Linda M. was in a detox unit for withdrawal from barbiturates. She had been taking  
1516 them addictively for several years. She was not given sleeping medication, nor did she  
1517 ask for any. “I knew I was going to have to fight this out sooner or later,” she says.  
1518 “The first night I didn’t sleep. The second night I didn’t sleep. I didn’t sleep the third,  
1519 or the fourth, or the fifth night. The sixth night I slept.”

1520

1521 Carl C. was pharmacist with a long history of addiction to narcotics. The first week of  
1522 recovery he called his sponsor at 4 a.m. on one of his most difficult nights of  
1523 sleeplessness. The sponsor advised him to turn on soothing music and to lie still and  
1524 try to relax but to try not to sleep. Carl took his sponsor's suggestions seriously. He lay  
1525 down, tried to relax and found himself awakening three hours later. He tried it again  
1526 and awakened three hours after that.

1527

## 1528 **Drugs, doctors, and pain**

1529 Physical sickness, being part of life, will inevitably be part of our recovery. In fact,  
1530 addicts who generally find it important to control events and people, may well  
1531 experience physical sickness as more of a threat than non-addicts. Unwelcome as  
1532 sickness is, particularly serious sickness, we assure you that the addict can stay clean,  
1533 remain relatively calm through this or any other ordeal with which life confronts us. It  
1534 would be an ineffective program for living which kept us clean during good times but  
1535 was incapable of offering us help when the going got tough.

1536 First of all, let's admit that medications hold special hazards for all addicts, not merely  
1537 those with a history of abusing prescription drugs. To an addict, medication or a pill  
1538 represents a means of control and in this case the control of a physical set. Like any  
1539 other tool of control its use can become compulsive. Occasionally someone in the  
1540 program will find himself taking the most harmless medications compulsively. Let's say  
1541 twenty or thirty aspirin a day, for instance, or a mega dose of vitamins. Is taking so  
1542 much aspirin that one's stomach bleeds any less destructive than taking a drug which  
1543 makes one high? Just as importantly, being compulsive about any medication could be  
1544 a sign that we have gone adrift, become distrustful of the healing powers of the  
1545 fellowship, and our program. When we take pills this way, it is like we're saying to  
1546 ourselves that God won't work. It's not entirely the content of the pill that creates the  
1547 problem; it's the content of the head.

1548 Let's first talk about pills that are not obviously mood altering, blood pressure  
1549 medication, for instance, or antibiotics. When taking such pills, the addict should ask  
1550 themselves two questions:

- 1551 1) If the pill is a prescription medication, do I take it as prescribed?
- 1552 2) Do I make a point of telling my sponsor and others close to me in the  
1553 program that I am taking the pill?

1554 The latter point is particularly important since secretiveness is an essential component  
1555 of substance abuse. If we are secretive about taking medications like aspirin or  
1556 antihistamines, it is certain that sooner or later the secret is going to create a problem.  
1557 On the other hand, when we are open with those in the program about any pill we use,  
1558 compulsive behavior has little to feed or grow on.

1559 Concerning the use of a medication for a specific physical complaint, we should always  
1560 remember that illness served as an ideal tool in our former addictive lifestyle. We used  
1561 it either to get attention or to get drugs. We were skilled at convincing doctors and  
1562 even ourselves of the intensity of a headache or the disabling quality of an anxiety  
1563 attack. Such ways of using physical sickness will, of course, tend to carry over into our  
1564 recovery. We must learn to spot when we are either exaggerating complaints or using  
1565 them for an ulterior motive. One sure sign is when fascination with the pill outweighs  
1566 our concern with the symptoms the pill is being taken for. Some of us will sheepishly  
1567 admit that our headaches or muscle spasms were left behind in the dust of our  
1568 excitement over a new medication as we raced from the doctor's office, script in hand.  
1569 Whenever the prospect of taking any medication makes our hearts beat faster, we are  
1570 on treacherous ground. It is especially then that we need the objective guidance and  
1571 experience of others in the program.

1572 Over the counter medications present special problems to an addict. Some cold pills  
1573 and anti-histamines are mood altering. Any cough suppressant containing alcohol is  
1574 dangerous for us. Recovering addicts should read labels on non-prescription drugs. It is  
1575 not that such substances will necessarily produce relapse into our addiction or cause us

1576 to get high, but any medication which changes our mood or thinking tends to push the  
1577 program out of our lives in subtle ways. Some of us have noticed that while taking cold  
1578 medication, we pray less. Once again a drug creates its own space in our lives. Some  
1579 people in the program refuse to take any non-prescribed medication. Before you take  
1580 any pill, even vitamins, it is a good idea to discuss it with your sponsor. A certain  
1581 danger warning is when you look forward to taking the pill and find yourself thinking a  
1582 lot about it.

1583 We generally have an idea of what we can safely take. Some of us know as much about  
1584 drugs as some pharmacists and doctors. We have an idea of what we can and can't take  
1585 safely. If a well-meaning physician, not knowledgeable in addiction, prescribes us a  
1586 narcotic, we know enough to ask if there is a non-narcotic alternative available.

1587 Many of us owned well-thumbed copies of the Physician's Desk Reference. We had an  
1588 eagle eye for pill size and color, and knew how much of a given product could be  
1589 counted on to produce what kind of high. One of our members recalls operating in his  
1590 addiction an informal pharmaceutical consulting service, often getting calls from his  
1591 using friends at 2 or 3 in the morning. Still, each new day brings a new drug, and the  
1592 longer we are clean, the more unfamiliar drugs will be. Faced with the prospect of  
1593 taking an unfamiliar drug, you have the right to know what is in it and how it will affect  
1594 you. You should discuss with your doctor your past addiction, what your recovery  
1595 means to you and what drugs have been particularly dangerous for you. This is a good  
1596 opportunity for you to be assertive about your recovery. Some of us feel more secure  
1597 in choosing physicians who are themselves in the program or who treat large numbers  
1598 of program members. Being assertive with doctors is more difficult for us because of  
1599 the role social tradition has cast them in a sort of scientific priesthood doling out health  
1600 and wisdom. They are in fact authority figures, and resentment and fear of authority  
1601 seems to be a basic part of our addictive personalities. Nevertheless, you must learn to  
1602 level with your doctor. Remember, it's your body, your mind, your spirit, not theirs. If  
1603 they can't seem to understand or handle the information you give them, it's best to find  
1604 it out as quickly as possible and choose another physician.

1605 When should you consult a physician? We do not advocate that you diagnose and treat  
1606 your own physical complaints, in other words, neither you nor we should act as  
1607 physicians. However, we point out that it is always the patient who decides when a  
1608 specific complaint requires a physician's attention. This has always been so. In fact,  
1609 who else can make the decision for them? The longer you live with a clean body and  
1610 the more information you acquire, the more likely you will be to know when to call the  
1611 doctor. An enormous number of complaints, such as ulcers, headaches, anxiety, aches  
1612 and pains, insomnia, sinus trouble are sometimes cured simply by staying clean. Some  
1613 seem to come early in recovery and then disappear. Some are solved by proper diet,  
1614 rest and exercise. Others may need a physician's attention.

1615 Pain killers are a specific problem for addicts. If you are experiencing great physical  
1616 pain should you allow yourself to take a prescribed narcotic? We admit that on this  
1617 issue experiences in the program are somewhat divided. It is a tribute to the spirit of  
1618 tolerance and love that the program fosters that people are generally unwilling to tell  
1619 anyone else what to do. After all, it's your pain. Each of us has probably made a private  
1620 decision, based on as much information as we have available, about what we would do  
1621 in such a situation, but sometimes the rude facts change our minds. "I vowed never to  
1622 take a narcotic for pain," one longtime clean member recalls. "That was before I took  
1623 my first crap after a hemorrhoid operation."

1624 It is important that you realize such events are rare. Fretting about what you should do  
1625 in such a situation is a little like worrying about your escape route in an earthquake. The  
1626 program, the fellowship, and God, as you understand Him, will keep you clean under  
1627 any and all conditions. We repeat our guarantee that if you stay in fit spiritual condition  
1628 you will not relapse.

1629 The following three stories, chosen from our many experiences, will illustrate how  
1630 Narcotics Anonymous members have handled this problem. All three program  
1631 members stayed clean.

1632 June M. had root canal work done. The work was done under Novocain. The dentist  
1633 warned her that the pain might be considerable when the anesthetic wore off and gave

1634 her a prescription for a narcotic pain medication. On leaving the dentist's office she  
1635 immediately telephoned her sponsor who suggested she at least wait till the anesthetic  
1636 wore off before she had the prescription filled and asked her to keep in close touch. By  
1637 this time June felt more threatened by the idea of taking the prescription than by the  
1638 pain. At times throughout the day the pain was severe, but June managed to keep  
1639 herself distracted, taking it sometimes thirty minutes at a time. That evening she made a  
1640 meeting and had a fairly comfortable night. The next morning, feeling pretty good, she  
1641 tore the prescription up. "That", she said, "was the hardest thing of all."

1642 Joe J. was scheduled for a urinary tract operation. For a week prior to his  
1643 hospitalization, he spoke about the operation at every meeting he attended. Despite  
1644 three years of recovery, he found himself very frightened. He was afraid of getting high  
1645 on the one hand and afraid on the other of that part of him that looked forward in  
1646 pleasure to the prospect of a "free" run. He had told his doctor about his addiction and  
1647 the doctor, at Joe's request, dispensed with the hospital's routine nightly prescription  
1648 for sleeping pills. Joe's drugs of choice were barbiturates. Joe received small doses of a  
1649 pain killer the first two days after the operation, but the fact that his room was  
1650 constantly full of visiting friends in the program improved his confidence so much that  
1651 he asked the doctor to stop the medication on the third day. Six years later, Joe is still  
1652 clean and active in the program.

1653 Rich S. is a recovering heroin addict, six months in the program. He was taken by  
1654 ambulance to the hospital in excruciating pain from a kidney stone. Doctors classify a  
1655 kidney stone as one of the two or three most painful physical ailments. He was shot  
1656 full of a pain killer and maintained on a heavy dosage. Though groggy, and at time  
1657 semi-conscious, he maintained constant telephone contact with people in the program.  
1658 Four days later the attack abated and Rich was released from the hospital. He continues  
1659 to make a meeting a day, and says he feels an enormous amount of gratitude to the  
1660 program.

1661



1662 **Telephone therapy**

1663 “You’re no longer alone,” the newcomer is told. “Use the fellowship; get telephone  
1664 numbers.” Often we stuffed the slips of paper covered with telephone numbers into  
1665 our pockets but never used them. What was the reason? The reason was, we didn’t  
1666 know how.

1667 That seems like a strange thing to say. Everyone knows how to use the telephone. It’s  
1668 one of our earliest learning experiences. You just pick up the phone, you dial the  
1669 number, and then. . . . Then what?

1670 Well, in this case we’re asking for help. We’re screwed up, maybe feeling suicidal,  
1671 depressed, craving a drug, suffering an anxiety attack, whatever. And we’ve been told to  
1672 telephone someone in the program whenever we get upset. But that’s our whole  
1673 problem. We’ve never learned how to ask for help. Doing so goes against our entire  
1674 using image. We were self-sufficient, tough, cool, the masters of our Game. Now here  
1675 we are shaking, frightened, having to ask for help, and maybe even having to ask for  
1676 help on a daily basis.

1677 It is useful here to quote a program paradox. “You have to surrender to win.” We  
1678 think about the people still into their addiction. Winners by their own account, and ask  
1679 ourselves what their lives are like. They’re winning all the way to the emergency wards,  
1680 the jails, the funeral parlors. Well, we admit, maybe we do need to learn to ask for help.

1681 Another thing we have to remember is that we not only ask for help, but by the  
1682 process of asking, we give help. We all need to be needed and we have made the other  
1683 person feel needed. They may have had their own bad day and will welcome the  
1684 contact. Also what you are doing is what they themselves had to do to get and stay  
1685 clean.

1686 How do we open the conversation? There are lots of ways.

1687 “Hello. I don’t know whether you remember me or not. I’m Karen, from the  
1688 Wednesday night meeting,” for example.

1689 Then comes the tricky part, letting the other person know you want help. Some lines  
1690 we’ve found effective are:

1691 “I feel I need to talk to someone.”

1692 “I liked what you had to say at the meeting last night.”

1693 “I’m sort of screwed up right now.”

1694 “I feel like using.”

1695 As we continue to use telephone therapy, we also learn how to share our joy. A new  
1696 job, a raise, a great meeting we attended, or other positive things we want to talk about.  
1697 Our telephone contacts become our network of new friends, program friends. Until  
1698 we build friendships in the program, it will be very difficult for us to let go of our using  
1699 acquaintances.

1700 We are often told that the recovering addict needs intimate daily contact with another  
1701 recovering addict. The telephone is one of the most effective ways of doing this. It’s a  
1702 tool that’s available any time of the day or night. We must learn to use it.

1703

## 1704 **Getting active**

1705 Newcomers often find themselves in a baffling situation. They have been told to attend  
1706 meetings regularly and to choose a sponsor, and perhaps have done so. Yet they may  
1707 feel on the outside of Narcotics Anonymous, cursed with the same feelings they had  
1708 during their addiction, still alone and isolated, never quite able to discover the secret  
1709 that would allow them to join the group, to really feel they belonged. They may even  
1710 project their feelings onto Narcotics Anonymous as a whole, bitterly accusing it of  
1711 being cliquish, snobbish, and disinterested in the newcomer’s welfare.

1712 Let us assure any newcomer feeling this way that they are partly right. We are at times  
1713 cliquish, we are at times snobbish, and we are not always sufficiently friendly in  
1714 welcoming the newcomer. In short, we are addicts just like you, trying to get well.  
1715 Much of our behavior, individually or as a group, is imperfect. We all have a lot of  
1716 changing to do.

1717 Having admitted that, let's get back to your feelings. What are you going to do? It may  
1718 come as a surprise to you to realize that there is a way you can change. By working the  
1719 Narcotics Anonymous program you are beginning to change yourself. Don't dwell on  
1720 trying to change Narcotics Anonymous without working on yourself first. What do  
1721 you imagine would be the fate of any group of addicts all of whom assembled for the  
1722 sole purpose of changing the others, never themselves? If the results weren't so fatal,  
1723 they might even be amusing. There is only one life you can take charge of and make  
1724 changes in, and that is your own.

1725 We may feel the program is not treating you fairly. Life is not fair, and there is no way  
1726 to change it. Birds eat worms, which is terribly unfair to the worms. Cats eat birds,  
1727 which is terribly unfair to the birds. It is our belief that those of us who continually  
1728 complain about the injustices of life and about our mistreatment by others are stalling.  
1729 It is a way of avoiding taking charge of our lives.

1730 We must take responsibility for our life. Getting involved in NA is a simple solution  
1731 for doing this. Members sometimes refer to getting involved as the service part of the  
1732 program.

1733 Here are some simple suggestions for getting involved.

1734 1) Do little things, offer to make coffee, and help set the room up. Such minor  
1735 efforts won't quite live up to our drug-induced fantasies about our noble fate,  
1736 but then neither will anything else that is good for us. Be a helper, not a  
1737 manager. It's amazing how often we stay clean by just doing the basics.

1738 2) You extend your hand to the newcomer. A member of Narcotics Anonymous  
1739 with a very healthy marriage was asked how they managed to do it. "It's easy,"  
1740 he replied. "We each give in 90 percent of the time." Being self-centered  
1741 people, we always imagine we are doing more than our share when in fact, we  
1742 seldom are. If you see a newcomer, go up to them and introduce yourself.  
1743 They need to talk to someone who is staying clean, and you are. One of the  
1744 worst things they can do is talk to their fellow newcomer, who is still partly  
1745 stuck in their Game.

1746 3) Go to the business meetings. While attending a business meeting, voting, and  
1747 otherwise sharing your contribution to the group conscience, you will feel you  
1748 belong. The newcomer has a valid opinion.

1749 4) Stay around after meetings. That's usually when much of the best examples of  
1750 the fellowship are expressed. Our isolation is the hardest part of our Game to  
1751 give up. We find ourselves saying things like, "We've got to get together  
1752 sometime," or "Let's go to a movie sometime." Often this translates to, "At  
1753 least I want to. But I can't, because I'm really afraid of people and what they  
1754 think of me." Sticking around after meetings is a relatively painless way of  
1755 allowing yourself to be drawn into the warmth of the fellowship. Usually  
1756 someone is going out for coffee, you can ask around. Or you can invite others  
1757 to go out.

1758 5) Those trivial coffee outings, often difficult and painful for newcomers,  
1759 sometimes have a big payoff. They signify that we are willing to get out of our  
1760 comfort zone, being open minded, ready to join the human race, and are ready  
1761 for change.

1762 There is one simple phrase which we all should keep in mind: *This is it*. There is  
1763 no future event that will be more important than this one. There is no magic  
1764 moment in our psychological futures when everything will begin to click and  
1765 we will really start living. This is it. Today, this meeting, the little coffee session

1766 or bull session afterwards, is all you have. Make yourself part of it. Unless we  
1767 make ourselves ready for the present, we will never be ready for the future.

1768 After you have been in the program a little while, these are some other things  
1769 you can do:

1770 a. Speak when you are asked to. This means to be the featured speaker at  
1771 a speaker/discussion meeting. Do you have enough time? A good way  
1772 of telling is: If the person who asked you believes you do, you do. You  
1773 may find that giving your first talk is a scary thing, but it is a way to  
1774 grow. Wanting to back out once you've agreed to talk is common.  
1775 Being totally pre-occupied with what you're going to say, even to the  
1776 extent of getting no sleep the night before is also common. It's a good  
1777 idea to approach giving your first talk in the following way: Don't  
1778 think of yourself as having to manage everything you say. Let God  
1779 guide your talk. Let your experiences and your words be the vehicle for  
1780 this message. If you look at it that way, then it's obvious that nothing  
1781 you can say will be wrong. You do not have to be "well" for anybody.

1782 No matter how you psych yourself up, you may find yourself sweating  
1783 and nervous.

1784 Great! The fellowship will love you for it.

1785 b. Take commitments. This means sharing at rehabs, prisons, hospitals,  
1786 and institutional Narcotics Anonymous groups. The positive effect on  
1787 our recovery is electrifying. We are vividly reminded of where we came  
1788 from, and where we are headed if we use again. We see very sick  
1789 people still in active addiction giving the same crazy excuses for their  
1790 behavior we once gave. "My God!" we think, "I once said that!"

1791 6) Do Twelfth Step work. You do not have to be clean long to go on a Twelfth  
1792 Step call, which means, carrying the message to the still-suffering addict as

1793 someone carried the message to you. You should always have a more  
1794 experienced member with you. Twelfth Step contacts are often made via a  
1795 Narcotics Anonymous hotline. Various members volunteer to take hotline  
1796 calls for a fixed period of time. Tell your home group you want to get involved  
1797 in this kind of work.

1798 Having so little clean time, you may wonder what you have to offer a new  
1799 person. What you have to offer is hope. Often still suffering addicts cannot  
1800 identify with a member who has been clean five years: It seems like an  
1801 impossible accomplishment. They can, however, identify with someone who's  
1802 been clean six months or less.

1803 You do not need to be wise or to have all the answers on a Twelfth Step call.  
1804 We share our experience, strength and hope. It says nothing about sharing our  
1805 wisdom.

1806 It is a good general policy to remember that men Twelfth Step men, women  
1807 Twelfth Step women.

1808 It has been said that when someone is ready to hear the message of recovery  
1809 you can't say anything wrong, and when someone is not ready, you can't say  
1810 anything right. So, go on the twelve step call, do your best, and let your higher  
1811 power be your guide. Your job is to plant the seed by delivering the message.  
1812 The rest is up to God.

1813 The above suggestions are some of the ways you can get involved. They're all ways of  
1814 committing yourself to a clean life. The group won't run after you. You must run  
1815 toward recovery.

1816

## 1817 **Loneliness**

1818 It has often been said that drug addiction is a lonely disease. As we continue to use,  
1819 more and more isolation and loneliness seep into our lives. This is one of the results of  
1820 the progression of our addiction. When we began using drugs, it was usually for social  
1821 purposes. We wanted to enjoy being with people, to be less inhibited and insecure, or  
1822 to be more spontaneous. Many of us imagined that using drugs made us feel the way  
1823 normal people felt all the time. We could joke, sing, dance, and have a good time. What  
1824 a marvelous medicine for our shyness and isolation. Eventually, we found we were  
1825 using drugs more and enjoying being around people less. Toward the end of our using  
1826 we found ourselves secretive, paranoid, and less and less able to stand the pressure of  
1827 being with others. Our addiction had built a glass wall between us and the rest of the  
1828 human race. One member, whose drugs of choice were uppers, tells the following  
1829 story:

1830 “I knew I was pulling away from everyone else. It really bothered me that others could  
1831 go out and socialize and have a good time and I couldn’t. I sweet-talked a retired  
1832 doctor out of a prescription for 500 Ritalin. He didn’t even know what they were!  
1833 These would help me be sociable, I thought. I would take them and for a while I  
1834 managed to get myself to go to a few parties and chatter endlessly with the people  
1835 there. But all that talk didn’t help me to feel any more comfortable with people--it  
1836 made things worse. Eventually I quit going out to social events; I would just go into  
1837 bars and talk to strangers or go home and take electrical appliances apart and put them  
1838 back together. One night, for no reason, I took the dashboard out of my new car. I  
1839 spent eight hours on it but I could never get it back in. I realized then that the drug had  
1840 caused me to totally desert people.”

1841 Another member, whose drug of choice was alcohol, has the following story. “Did you  
1842 ever have the feeling that you wanted to go someplace and do something, but didn’t  
1843 know what it was? That was the story of my drinking. I would go into one bar after  
1844 another, looking for the party. I would go to ten or twenty different bars, looking for it.  
1845 Maybe another city is where it’s really happening,” I would tell myself. “Sometime I’m

1846 going to San Francisco or Mexico City.” But, of course, I would just give up and go  
1847 home. The party wasn’t there either, just an empty, spooky looking apartment.”

1848 Most of us have all had the experience of being lonely in a crowd. If only there was  
1849 someone who understood us and who loved us! It may come as a surprise to us that  
1850 having someone who understands and loves us is no cure for loneliness, either. In fact,  
1851 it can make the pain of loneliness worse.

1852 A young man clean six months in the program tells the following story.

1853 “After supper I sit at home with my wife and my little girl. We have a really good  
1854 marriage. She goes to Nar-Anon so she understands me and my problems pretty well. I  
1855 love her, and I love my little girl. But as I sit there talking to them or looking at them, I  
1856 realize I feel totally and completely alone. And I had told myself that having these  
1857 people to love would take my loneliness away.”

1858 Yes, often we’re lonely in a crowd and we’re certainly lonely alone. The idea of  
1859 spending time by ourselves throws us into a panic. We may try to make sure that every  
1860 hour of our day is socially accounted for--that we are by ourselves as little as possible.

1861 What a dilemma! What’s the solution? Because we were lonely in our addiction, does  
1862 this mean we will inevitably be lonely in our recovery?

1863 It may help us to recognize at this point that many people besides addicts get lonely.  
1864 It’s just that we specialized in it. The guilt about our using, our desire to control events  
1865 and people, our feelings of being unique and unlovable, tend to magnify an already  
1866 existing loneliness. Not being able to be with ourselves or with others are problems all  
1867 humans have to come to terms with. Someone once said that all of our problems stem  
1868 from the fact that we haven’t learned to sit by ourselves in a room. Although  
1869 recovering addicts may have to work extra hard on our loneliness, we are joined in the  
1870 struggle by the rest of the human race.

1871 Most of us in Narcotics Anonymous, because of stories like the ones told in the  
1872 beginning of this chapter, have come to realize that loneliness is not a social or a



1873 psychological problem. While it is certain that coming to terms with this has to be an  
1874 inside job, we believe that loneliness is a spiritual condition.

1875 To the newcomer, this may be a very surprising statement. However, our experiences  
1876 have born it out. We have discovered that applying to our lives systematically the  
1877 spiritual principles of the Narcotics Anonymous program, particularly the Third and  
1878 Eleventh Steps, is the most effective way to overcome loneliness. With these steps we  
1879 align our will with God's will. We become sensitive to God's presence in and around  
1880 us. In this way, the walls around us we have built up through our addiction can be  
1881 broken down. As one often hears it put at meetings, "We rejoin the human race." The  
1882 ideas of a God within us and the comfortable feeling of being at one with the rest of  
1883 the world are very old ideas. These spiritual principles are ones that people for  
1884 thousands of years have recognized as being essential to emotional health.

1885 Although being around people isn't a cure for loneliness, it's pretty clear that God can't  
1886 be discovered in a vacuum. We find God through people. Here are some suggestions  
1887 for combating loneliness:

- 1888 1. Commit yourself to being around people working this program. Loneliness  
1889 tends to breed on itself. If we haven't made plans to be around others in  
1890 advance, we find we don't have the energy to seek out people when we are  
1891 lonely. It's a good idea to carry around a little engagement calendar. Make plans  
1892 with others in the program before you go to a meeting. It takes up the slack  
1893 between getting out of work and meeting time. Most newcomers find  
1894 themselves sliding into self-pity when they eat alone. How do you approach  
1895 someone to make a dinner plans? Simple; call the person up and read this to  
1896 him or her. "This is Todd from the Thursday night meeting. I wondered  
1897 whether you might like to have supper and then go to the meeting tonight."  
1898 This situation is one of the reasons we suggest getting a network of people to  
1899 call.

- 1900 2. We have found it difficult to experience loneliness when we spoke at a  
1901 meeting, went on a Twelfth Step call, or participating on a H&I panel meeting  
1902 with a bunch of Narcotics Anonymous members.
- 1903 3. Talk about your loneliness at a meeting. People who share their loneliness to  
1904 each other often find themselves not lonely.
- 1905 4. Don't expect to find a cure for loneliness in casual or compulsive sex. Many of  
1906 us try it, but we always end up feeling cheated and lonelier. Why? Because  
1907 when we express our sexuality this way, we are denying ourselves and the other  
1908 person a real meaningful connection. Our partner becomes just a collection of  
1909 physical traits that we use to get off on sexually. The word "get off" was  
1910 chosen carefully; sex used this way is a game very close to the using Game. We  
1911 don't take a moral stand against casual sex. We just advise you not to expect  
1912 too much from it, in particular, not to expect it to furnish a solution to your  
1913 human problems.
- 1914 5. If you're beginning to have persistent problems with loneliness, it's a sign you  
1915 may want be focusing on the spiritual part of the program. This is  
1916 accomplished by the daily use of the Third and Eleventh Steps, by praying, and  
1917 by reading related spiritual material. If you like to read, you have a choice of a  
1918 number of nonsectarian, nonreligious books that discuss our need for God  
1919 and how God works through us.
- 1920 6. Use your sponsor. Your sponsor can provide valuable guidance and experience  
1921 for dealing with loneliness.
- 1922 7. Ask if people are going out for coffee after the meeting. If so, ask if you can  
1923 join them. All of us remember what it was to be like when we were a  
1924 newcomer. One member shared, "I was desperately lonely without my drugs. I  
1925 would go out for coffee, and just sit there; scared to be alone, scared to be with  
1926 other people. However, I knew that if I was with a group of recovering  
1927 addicts, even though I was scared, chances are I wasn't going to get high. At

1928           least then. When I didn't have money for a cup of coffee someone always paid  
1929           for me and normally said, 'You do the same for a newcomer when you can  
1930           afford it. Just as someone did for me.' Pay it forward; love, kindness,  
1931           compassion, and sometimes a cup of coffee."

1932       The Narcotics Anonymous program works to rid us of loneliness if we work it. We  
1933       find that we can come to enjoy a richness and intensity of human companionship  
1934       we've never experienced. We can even enjoy being alone, which is something we never  
1935       before believed possible. We become our own best friend, a source of love, self-  
1936       esteem, and comfort. When we go from being our own enemy to being our own  
1937       friend, we're finally growing up.

1938       "I just wanted to get away from everyone and all the confusion of the city, so I went  
1939       fishing by myself yesterday. I really enjoyed it." This, such a typical statement made at a  
1940       meeting, proves we can come to terms with ourselves. It is one of the great rewards of  
1941       the program.

## 1942       **Pornography**

1943       As addicts we are prone to instant gratification, a desire to feel good, and a need to run  
1944       from our feelings to escape reality. Porn offers us all of these. Combined with our  
1945       addictive need for more, porn can consume our lives, set us up for relapse, ruin  
1946       relationships and marriages all while taking us to dark unspiritual places for that  
1947       temporary high.

1948       For many of us, we started on porn innocently. Perhaps we did not want to cheat on  
1949       our partner, so we simply searched the web for some assistance in masturbating. Our  
1950       predecessors used to inform newcomers of the 3 M's; meetings, meditation, and  
1951       masturbation. But this was back in the days of picking up a magazine that you  
1952       probably have had lying around for years.

1953       The impact that porn has had on recovering addicts has increased with the creation of  
1954       the Internet. Our predecessors had to obtain a magazine, book, or DVD. Now we are  
1955       able to get unlimited porn, free of charge, feeding our insatiable desire for more.

1956 With the Internet, most of us seem to explore more and more. What may have started  
1957 off with a simple search for a hair color, 6 months later ends up with an extreme search  
1958 of images that are dark and degrading to our sisters and brothers. More often our  
1959 fellow human beings creating porn are being forced into the industry through human  
1960 trafficking, drug addiction, sexual addition, or some other horrible reason.

1961 Many of us have had our relationships and mindset damaged by porn. One member  
1962 stated how he could no longer look at women without undressing them mentally. This  
1963 can be a horrible experience when your friend catches you staring at his wife's breasts,  
1964 or your son catches you checking out his girlfriend's ass, or you sleep with your best  
1965 friend's partner because you just want more.

1966 Porn allows us to drift apart from our partner. Those of us who choose to be in a  
1967 monogamous relationship find it difficult to perform with our partner; especially if our  
1968 porn searching has taken us to images of partners much different that our partner. We  
1969 are mentally looking to satisfy our sexual fantasy and what we have in front of us is  
1970 reality. The further apart fantasy and reality are, the more we don't want to be in  
1971 reality. We find ourselves longing for fantasy.

1972 However, those of us who have worked through the issue and are now on the other  
1973 side of porn will often find ourselves checking out our partners; admiring their body,  
1974 thinking of them when masturbating or just desiring to have sex. Another added  
1975 benefit is when we find someone attractive, we simply think that person is nice looking,  
1976 and move on. We no longer gawk and stare like a creeper while undressing them with  
1977 our eyes imaging them bent over the closest table.

1978 We are not saying not to masturbate, nor are we saying not to watch porn if that is  
1979 what you and your partner are into. What we are saying is that porn has taken many of  
1980 our members back out to active addiction. The lying, sneaking, and deceptive behavior  
1981 often associated with porn feeds addictive behavior. It feeds our addiction not our  
1982 recovery. This sets us on the path to relapse.

1983 Porn allows us to form a new addiction pattern which in the end brings as many  
1984 problems as we had before. It would appear that we are people with addictive  
1985 personalities that are strongly susceptible to porn addiction.

1986 What we suggest you be on the lookout for how your desire to watch porn is  
1987 interfering with your life. If you are getting sneaky, lying, or making extra time to  
1988 watch porn, then it is impacting your life. If you find yourself thinking or acting in a  
1989 different way towards people because of what you are watching, then you have become  
1990 addicted to pornography.

### 1991 **Dry highs and using dreams**

1992 A dry high may be defined as a period of emotional instability where a person is  
1993 behaving as someone who is high but hasn't taken any drugs. It's essentially a non-  
1994 stoned stoner moment. Although a dry high takes place when we are clean in the  
1995 program, hence the word "dry", the emotions we experience on the binge recall those  
1996 we underwent while using. Some of the symptoms are anger, being at odds with  
1997 everyone including ourselves, acute feelings of impatience and rebelliousness, more  
1998 than our usual amount of resentments and self-pity, and occasionally the desire to use  
1999 or to get back into our Game. Our anger may even be directed at people in the  
2000 program because of their inability to give us what we feel we need.

2001 Addicts have always had problems with authority. We have always hated it and feared  
2002 it. While practicing the Narcotics Anonymous program will help us come to terms with  
2003 this part of our personalities, we may find that during a dry high we backslide  
2004 considerably. We may mouth off at a boss, drive recklessly, dare a policeman to stop  
2005 us, break furniture or dishes. One member slammed an expensive radio to smithereens  
2006 against a wall because he objected to a disk jockey's analysis of a popular record.

2007 If it seems to you that such behavior is childish and self-indulgent, you are right. A dry  
2008 high is really a prolonged temper tantrum, a reversion to the child state with all its  
2009 demands on the rest of the human race. Unfortunately, the rest of the human race goes  
2010 on, ignoring our tantrum or politely but firmly closing the door on us.

2011 A dry high need not pose a threat to our recovery. It depends on how quickly we  
2012 decide to deal with it. Once we spot our behavior for what it is, a tantrum, rather than  
2013 rationalizing it the way we used to rationalize all of our destructive behavior, the dry  
2014 high is near its end.

2015 A sure cure for a dry high is gratitude. How can we persist in our childish demands on  
2016 life if we are made aware of the awful hell we have just come from? The part of us that  
2017 doesn't want to get well is the part of us that wants to prolong our bad moods and play  
2018 them for maximum dramatic effect, and doesn't want to feel grateful. We would rather  
2019 be right than be well.

2020 If we have been active in the program, we are pretty well insulated from the worst  
2021 consequences of a dry high. Soon someone newer than us will be placed in our path,  
2022 someone still confused and really suffering, who needs our help.

2023 Dreams of using are something almost all of us have experienced. The dreams take  
2024 many forms. One common one is where the dreamer uses just a small amount of a  
2025 drug, and then spends the rest of the dream worrying about the effect on his recovery,  
2026 whether he will lose control, or how he can hide his using or explain his using to  
2027 members in the program. Program members remark on the intensity and realistic  
2028 quality of the dreams. We may awake bathed in sweat, confused and panicky. It may  
2029 take us several minutes to realize it was only a dream. One member recalls searching  
2030 his apartment frantically for a syringe after a using dream.

2031 The newcomer may be surprised, even relieved, to know that we in Narcotics  
2032 Anonymous think using dreams can be a healthy sign. We have consciously accepted  
2033 the fact that we are powerless over drugs. It is likely that using dreams reflect the  
2034 attempt of our subconscious to come to terms with our conscious decision. It is a way  
2035 of working the First Step. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to talk about such dreams at a  
2036 meeting, if only for the reason that they are upsetting. In fact, you have probably heard  
2037 others discuss them. While the dreams seem to become rarer and less intense, even  
2038 members with ten or more years of solid recovery occasionally have them. Like most  
2039 of the other experiences you will have in staying clean, they are normal.

2040

## 2041 **Sex and relationships**

2042 “Don’t take a drug, don’t get involved,” is some advice the newcomer is likely to hear.  
2043 They can understand the first part of the advice, after all the devastation of drug use is  
2044 what brought them to Narcotics Anonymous in the first place. But what’s this about  
2045 not getting involved? Involved with what?

2046 The word “involved” means romantically involved. “What is this?” may be the  
2047 newcomer’s reaction. “Is Narcotics Anonymous telling me not to fall in love? Isn’t love  
2048 what life’s about?”

2049 We can understand the newcomer’s confusion and dismay. All of our lives we have  
2050 been given a hard sell on the idea of romance. Turn on a TV set and sooner or later  
2051 you will see two people sauntering on a beach in a sunset, windblown hair, holding  
2052 hands, smiling adoringly at each other. Multiply this brief sequence by a million or so  
2053 and you will get the number of times we have each been exposed to the same message:  
2054 Romantic love is what life is all about. The goal of every normal person is to discover  
2055 that one special someone who is going to give meaning to life and then settle down  
2056 with that person in never ending bliss.

2057 As an addict we have always sought for something outside ourselves to solve our  
2058 problems, the product of romantic love has an eager consumer. The message seems  
2059 clear: Life with romance is everything; life without romance is no life at all, something  
2060 bleak, merely to be waited out, until romance comes along.

2061 Perhaps the search for romance can work as a priority for some people. We addicts  
2062 running after romance can easily make a mess of our lives. We don’t say this because  
2063 Narcotics Anonymous is against love. We do believe that love is a part of the  
2064 foundation for life. There is a big difference between love and lust, and they often have  
2065 little to do with each other.

2066 To clarify what we are really looking for in romance, let's examine our state of mind  
2067 when we came into Narcotics Anonymous. We are adrift in confusion, our moods  
2068 roller-coasting between depression and euphoria. It's understandable why we are the  
2069 way we are. We recovering addicts in the beginning of the most profound change we  
2070 will ever make in our lives. After several months of recovery, we often feel like  
2071 screaming, "Please! No more changes! Just let me tread water for a little while." We are  
2072 condemned to either go forward or we drift backward. As addicts, we are resistant to  
2073 change.

2074 We have always looked for something outside of ourselves to make us well. What we  
2075 have to learn and to accept when we come into Narcotics Anonymous is that there is  
2076 no easy fix. There are no soft, easy ways to recover. Staying clean always involves a lot  
2077 of work.

2078 As you may have guessed by now, looking for romance is just our old pursuit of an  
2079 easy fix. It is a softer, easier way of staying clean that, in the end, turns out not to be  
2080 softer or easier at all. We always find that romantic involvements have their own kind  
2081 of torture for us. The pain caused by a messy love affair exceeds the pain of whatever  
2082 we were using the affair to avoid growing up.

2083 The newly recovered addict is rarely mature enough to manage an emotional  
2084 involvement. Those early years in life when most normal people are learning to deal  
2085 with their emotions we have spent using. For us, there was never a need to grow up.  
2086 Gaining maturity, that ultimate defense against life's misfortunes, always took a back  
2087 seat to getting high.

2088 When we recovering addicts take a hard look at what we are like, as we must in our  
2089 Fourth Step inventory, we are genuinely surprised to find how much of our behavior is  
2090 affected by our immaturity. We discover that we have always had an all or nothing  
2091 attitude about life, with little appreciation of moderation. We have tended to idealize  
2092 people and events, rather than accepting them as they are. Our total self-centeredness  
2093 led us to believe that others exist solely to fulfill our wants. We have a low frustration  
2094 tolerance, and our self-concept has alternated between feelings of power and self-



2095 hatred. In fact, we have a very limited idea of what we are really like. Our immaturity is  
2096 so noticeable to the people around us that one doctor who specialized in treating  
2097 addiction, labeled the addict “His majesty, the infant.” Since we are trying to stay clean,  
2098 and are trying to feel better about ourselves, that label hurts. But there is simply too  
2099 much truth in the doctor’s observation for us to ignore it.

2100 We do get better. One goal of the Narcotics Anonymous program is to rescue us from  
2101 our perpetual state of childishness. Growth, though inevitable if we work the program,  
2102 is slow. The fact is that a healthy relationship requires qualities we have very little of  
2103 when we are new in the program.

2104 What qualities must we be able to bring to a relationship? First of all, we need to know  
2105 how to be a friend. Most of us who are new in the program have little idea of how to  
2106 socialize or how to be a friend. We are often uptight and preoccupied around people.  
2107 We have little feeling for how to handle another person’s moods, particularly, another  
2108 person’s silence. Friendship requires tolerance, trust, forgiveness, acceptance of the  
2109 good along with the bad, and the ability not to put conditions on the other person. Can  
2110 any of us honestly say that we had such qualities when we came into the program? Like  
2111 all other living skills, these things have to be learned. Which of us, fresh out of the  
2112 Game that required us to defend our stash and always keep ourselves covered, can  
2113 claim the ability to trust others?

2114 Secondly, a relationship requires of us an ability to give that we’ve never learned. We  
2115 are by nature takers, not givers. Allowing someone to be whoever they are in any and  
2116 all situations is giving that person their freedom. It is our nature to put demands on the  
2117 other person, to lay down rules for behavior. Our insecurity about who we are and our  
2118 deep-seated fear that we will lose the other person makes us possessive, demanding,  
2119 and jealous. We have seen many of our members who were fully aware that their  
2120 possessiveness and continual childish demands were destroying a relationship but who  
2121 were unable to act otherwise. This is always the plight of newcomers in relationships:  
2122 They may see what they are doing wrong, but are powerless to do anything else. The  
2123 truth is that our possessiveness and jealousy don’t result from lack of insight into our

2124 behavior. They come about because of our immaturity. When we grow up, we will no  
2125 longer be jealous people, but that is hardly a help to us in our first year or so of staying  
2126 clean. In the meantime, we usually find we simply cannot allow the other person in the  
2127 relationship to be who he or she is. We feel we have too much to lose.

2128 When such character defects come into play in a relationship, it often signifies the  
2129 beginning of the end. The partner feels suffocated by our nagging and deprived of the  
2130 opportunity for personal growth. Eventually, the other person wants out.

2131 Of course it's a disappointment to us to realize that we can't have something we want.  
2132 "How," we ask ourselves, "can something that makes us feel so good be so bad for  
2133 us?" We might have said the same thing about our drug. The similarities go further. It's  
2134 not just that we can't handle the interpersonal mechanics of a relationship, the feelings  
2135 that romance give us are dangerously close to those of being high. Romance triggers  
2136 chemical changes in the brain that mimic a self-induced chemical high.

2137 It's obvious that love used in this way is an addiction. The danger these feelings pose to  
2138 our recovery is great. We have seen many of our members, unable to deal with a  
2139 destructive romance, resume using in a desperate last-ditch effort to bring their feelings  
2140 under control. They may use in an effort to punish the other person or to punish  
2141 themselves.

2142 Not surprisingly, when romance moves into the recovering addict's life, our recovery is  
2143 no longer a priority. We find ourselves going to fewer meetings, and those meetings we  
2144 do begrudgingly go to; we spend in thinking obsessively about our lover. The tools of  
2145 the program are put aside. Why do we need the program when we have the one person  
2146 who is going to make our lives right? If we undermine our commitment to the  
2147 program, we will not be able to stay clean.

2148 For newcomers in the program emotional involvement poses special dangers. Some of  
2149 us are taught to believe we are incomplete unless we have a partner. The Narcotics  
2150 Anonymous program demands that we learn self-respect and self-love. Obviously, self-

2151 respect can never be ours if we allow ourselves to be trapped in an abusive relationship  
2152 whose whole message is that we are worthless.

2153 For us we have a word of hope. You can change yourself. You can change the object  
2154 of your sexual and love interest. As you continue to stay clean and apply the principles  
2155 of Narcotics Anonymous to your life, particularly the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh  
2156 Steps. Your self-regard will grow; you will become a better friend to yourself and will  
2157 be less compelled to seek out others who are punishing. By developing inner strength  
2158 and self-reliance, you will find it less important to try to get these qualities from  
2159 someone else. If you are patient, the program will change your view of others. You will  
2160 be interested in meeting and getting to know people who can give, not those who can  
2161 only take.

2162 Some men in the program must make changes in their emotional natures. Men need to  
2163 learn to be sensitive and to develop good, honest communication with others. They  
2164 need to learn that it is all right for them to feel and become vulnerable.

2165 We have indicated how we all encounter difficulties in forming and sustaining  
2166 friendships. Perhaps for women this is difficult, since they have usually been raised to  
2167 view other women as rivals and competitors for the affection of men. The young girl  
2168 discovers it is important to dress attractively, use make-up, flirt, all for the purpose of  
2169 gaining an edge over other women. An unattached man in his forties is seen as a  
2170 distinguished and eligible bachelor. An unattached woman in her forties is seen as  
2171 defective. A woman can change this view of themselves. In the program, whatever our  
2172 age, we come to recognize our own special worth and the worth of all others. We  
2173 learn to stop evaluating others by external traits.

2174 The Narcotics Anonymous program makes it possible for women to enjoy the  
2175 friendship of other women, for many an unfamiliar experience. Often at a meeting  
2176 one hears a woman talk in gratitude about such a friendship. Women in the program  
2177 come to realize that other women can offer them a unique kind of closeness and  
2178 emotional support. The growing self-love that the program gives all of us is what opens  
2179 them up to such friendships.

2180 Absolutely the worst romantic involvement a newcomer can fall into is one where the  
2181 partner is a newcomer also. Two sickies don't make a well relationship. Such  
2182 relationships usually run a brief and disastrous course. About the only thing two  
2183 newcomers can share is their Game. Such a relationship tends to isolate both from  
2184 those in the program with wisdom and experience. The loss of this life-giving contact  
2185 often spells the end of recovery. This relationship undermines any kind of reasonable  
2186 meeting schedule. If the partners attend the same meetings they are usually obsessed in  
2187 the contemplation of each other, or each is trying to say something especially wise for  
2188 the other's benefit. There are exceptions. We all know of solid relationships which  
2189 began under the most adverse conditions. But we have seen many, many more  
2190 program members get high from entering a relationship too soon, particularly, a  
2191 relationship with another newcomer. It is like playing Russian roulette with five  
2192 chambers loaded.

2193 It may take considerably more than one year of recovery for us to be able to build a  
2194 healthy relationship. We must get to know ourselves before we can offer anything to  
2195 anyone else. A member entering a relationship should stay in very close contact with  
2196 the sponsor and the program. We have seen even program members with strong  
2197 programs derailed by unfortunate relationships. One of our most difficult tasks is to  
2198 unlearn all the unrealistic expectations concerning love that society has saturated us  
2199 with. We have to accept the fact that there will be times when we are pretty much out  
2200 of touch with our love for our partner. There will inevitably be arguments and  
2201 sometimes long-standing clashes of temperament. Almost any two people living  
2202 together find they have to agree to disagree about certain things, and there are always  
2203 certain topics which must by mutual consent be placed off-limits. To continually bring  
2204 up a subject which embarrasses or pains the partner is not honesty, it is aggressiveness.

2205 We all want the good qualities a loving relationship can bring into our lives, but fighting  
2206 through the bad that exists in any relationships can call for every ounce of our new-  
2207 found maturity. Most program members who are involved in a successful relationship  
2208 have learned it is more work than anything else. Above all, we can't expect any  
2209 romantic feelings to last very long or to offer the relationship much stability or

2210 direction when they are present. All in all, we have to give a firm NO to society's  
2211 attempt to sell us the commodity of romantic love.

2212 One program member with six year clean survived several nearly disastrous romantic  
2213 involvements in his recovery and eventually met a woman, not a program member,  
2214 whom he began dating on a casual basis, almost as a friend. The friendship deepened  
2215 into love, not romantic love, and two years later they decided to marry. The  
2216 relationship shows every sign of being a healthy one.

2217 In choosing a workable approach to the sex verses no sex dilemma, the newcomer  
2218 should once again strive for moderation. The pursuit of sex for the sake of sex can  
2219 create difficulties for us. Sex itself becomes an addiction.

2220 We all tend to carry around so much guilt about our past sexual behavior. Most of us  
2221 have used sex extensively in several ways: as a power play, as a substitute to getting  
2222 high, as a means of obtaining drugs or money, and as a way of controlling our  
2223 emotions.

2224 Young males, particularly those into street drugs, often undergo a series of brief  
2225 homosexual liaisons while in their addiction, even though they may not be gay. Such  
2226 incidents have a definite pay-off for the addict, sometimes money or drugs but often  
2227 rewards that are more complex. The addict may be looking for excitement, a stabilizing  
2228 father figure, attention, or just plain affection. Our unwillingness to face the fact that  
2229 we enjoyed these experiences often causes us to come into the program with an  
2230 unnecessary burden of guilt. "Are we gay?" Many of us wonder. Some of us are but  
2231 more often than not these homosexual contacts of the past don't mean very much.  
2232 Most males in our culture have had early homosexual experiences. The point is that  
2233 whatever our sexual identity is, the program will offer us a way of dealing with it. You  
2234 no longer have to be afraid of who you are.

2235 Some women among us often used their sexuality as a commodity, sometimes as a way  
2236 of controlling the males in their lives, sometimes in return for drugs, stability, or  
2237 protection. The female can experience sex without enjoying it. Women addicts have

2238 the opportunity to make sex a much more functional part of their Game than male  
2239 addicts. It may be more difficult for the recovering woman addict to enter into a sexual  
2240 relationship without returning to her Game.

2241 Handling sex responsibly is an important goal of our recovery. The sharing of your  
2242 experiences with other program members, when it is appropriate, in closed or special  
2243 interest meetings, will prove to be a vital tool in helping you to function in healthy ways  
2244 sexually as well as to come to terms with your sexual guilt. We often think our sexual  
2245 experiences make us unique, but it's usually not the case. The chances of your having a  
2246 sexual event in your past not shared by other recovering addicts are very small. As we  
2247 grow in the program we come to look upon our past sexual misbehavior with good-  
2248 natured humor rather than grim embarrassment and shame. As badly as it sometimes  
2249 served us, it was often the only way we knew to reach out for the love and the meaning  
2250 we so desperately wanted out of life.

2251 After all these dire warnings, we want to end this chapter on a note of optimism. You  
2252 can, perhaps for the first time, experience deep and meaningful relationships. The tools  
2253 of the program will prepare us to be loved and be loving people. Love is what life is all  
2254 about. By staying clean in the Narcotics Anonymous program, we can bring love into  
2255 our lives in an abundant, healthy manner.

2256

## 2257 **HOW**

2258 Many of us have found the acronym HOW helpful: "H" for honesty, "O" for open  
2259 mindedness, "W" for willingness to try.

2260 It is often said that staying clean calls for "rigorous honesty." Learning to be honest is  
2261 an ongoing process. In recovery, we strive to be completely honest. As time goes on  
2262 and we put in the effort, many of us have found we become more honest with  
2263 ourselves and others. Behavior we can live with today may not be tolerated in ourselves  
2264 tomorrow. As we come to think more of ourselves, our standards increase. What has

2265 to be rigorous about our honesty is our willingness to look at our behaviors, in our step  
2266 work, and to others through our sharing at meetings. We can no longer afford to  
2267 ignore our own behavior. When we view our own behavior as if they were  
2268 unimportant, we are not thinking clearly. Viewing our actions this way means we still  
2269 have a lot of self-hate left in us. We do not think we are worthwhile enough to clean up  
2270 our act.

2271 Self-respect is the real issue involved here. It's nice to be honest, but that's not the  
2272 reason the Narcotics Anonymous program calls for honesty. One of our major  
2273 problems as addicts is our isolation from others. Dishonesty serves to maintain our  
2274 isolation because it is a way of getting over on others, a way of living a secret life. In  
2275 Narcotics Anonymous we need God and we need people. Deliberate and systematic  
2276 dishonesty separates us from both.

2277 We grow in our ability to be honest. Sometimes at a meeting we may hear a confession  
2278 of stealing. True, the speaker may still be stealing, but has given up the option of  
2279 keeping the stealing a secret. When this happens, it is a major victory. Behavior we do  
2280 not like in ourselves is, when we own up to it, on its way to being past behavior.  
2281 Talking about our dishonesty at meetings is a commitment to deal with it on the  
2282 program's terms.

2283 Dishonesty, particularly stealing, is often very difficult to give up. We used it for so  
2284 many purposes. Sometimes we stole to punish people. This way served as a substitute  
2285 for being assertive and for dealing in a straight-forward manner with our feelings about  
2286 someone else. Our boss didn't pay us enough, so we stole. Someone had a nicer car, so  
2287 we stole the hubcaps. Stealing was a power trip. In fact, fantasies and day dreams about  
2288 power constituted a major part of our mental life. If we wish to stay clean, we cannot  
2289 afford to have any kind of power over other people.

2290 We may work at a job where our employer insists on a certain amount of dishonesty.  
2291 We may be salespeople asked to misrepresent a service or product, for example. As we  
2292 grow we find ourselves angrily resenting the fact that we are asked to do such a thing.  
2293 We are then plagued with the twin demons of resentment and dishonesty. If you are in

2294 such a situation, talk at meetings and talk to your sponsor. You will get the courage you  
2295 need to make the decision you must make.

2296 Let's talk about open mindedness. For us it's not an easy trait to come by. We have  
2297 developed the habit of being cynical and always putting everything down. It was a way  
2298 of protecting ourselves, and also a cheap way of getting attention. Whatever happened,  
2299 we could proudly say No.

2300 In staying clean we learn to be open-minded to other people's ideas and opinions.  
2301 Sometimes by saying Yes we replace negativity with positivity. It is hard, negativity was  
2302 a life-long habit. It's often said that the Narcotics Anonymous program is like a  
2303 cafeteria line. You take what you want, and leave the rest. Keep an open mind. If you  
2304 find someone talking at a meeting who annoys you, ask yourself, "What is the  
2305 message?" We find that we can learn from those we dislike. This is a certain sign we are  
2306 growing. Remember that others, including you, have the right to be wrong.

2307 At first we hear many things that make no sense to us. Things such as, "You have to  
2308 surrender to win," for instance. Some of us may be totally turned off, angry and  
2309 frightened by the spiritual part of the program. Just when we thought this program was  
2310 going to save our ass, they hit us with God! Another religious trip! It is particularly in  
2311 this area that open mindedness pays off. The God we speak of has very little to do with  
2312 all the bad associations that word holds for you. Be open minded enough to reserve  
2313 judgment until you find out what we are talking about.

2314 We may not want to hear that we have to quit stealing, that we can't go back to school,  
2315 that we can't have a romantic involvement. But as you hear this annoying suggestion,  
2316 remember that those who give it have had an enormous amount of hard, practical  
2317 experience, and have seen people die who wouldn't listen. Try to be open-minded to  
2318 the fact that what is being suggested may work for you.

2319 Finally, let's look at Willingness. Most of us were distinctly unwilling when we came  
2320 into Narcotics Anonymous. There's a saying that no one comes into Narcotics  
2321 Anonymous of their own free will. Many of us were forced in, either by a condition of



2322 employment, by family pressure, or a court stipulation. In a certain sense, none of us  
2323 want to be here. Our behavior usually reflects our ambivalence about our recovery. We  
2324 may intentionally distract ourselves at meetings, or descend to sulking and silent scorn  
2325 in social situations. The willingness to recover does not always come easy.

2326 However, as more of the rewards of being clean accumulate, we find our enthusiasm  
2327 about recovery increasing. We begin to really like the people we meet in Narcotics  
2328 Anonymous, and to hear speakers with whom we deeply identify. Talking to others  
2329 about important things in our lives is a new and exciting experience. We discover life  
2330 can actually be good, and even better than we had ever imagined. We find ourselves  
2331 laughing, enjoying being with people, awakening each day with more enthusiasm and  
2332 energy. If we give it a chance, being clean will sell itself. As they say, bring the body and  
2333 the mind will follow. The willingness to stay clean comes with staying clean.

2334

## 2335 **Anger and resentments**

2336 Anger plays a central role in the life of every addict. Unless we make every attempt to  
2337 deal constructively with our anger, we stand a chance of using again. People in the  
2338 Narcotics Anonymous program who have relapsed often admit that it was a bout of  
2339 intense anger, or an ongoing resentment, which led them to use again.

2340 The emotion of anger was an intimate part of our using game. Often we got high so  
2341 that we could act out an already existing anger. For example, "I'll get even with him!"  
2342 or, paradoxically, we got high to control an anger that seemed to be consuming us.  
2343 One form our anger took was to use at people, "I'll show them! I'll get high!" It was a  
2344 way we expressed our rebellion at parents and all other authority figures.

2345 Anger we experience in early recovery will trigger these same reactions, and we will find  
2346 ourselves tempted once again to use to get even at someone or to control our resulting  
2347 thoughts or feelings.

2348 Of course, anger is a natural emotion. All humans experience anger in one or more of  
2349 its many forms. We can't simply wish it away. For the addict, anger has a special  
2350 significance. We more than anyone else were the victims of our own anger. When we  
2351 used at someone, who got hurt?

2352 Those of us who used drugs to control our anger are genuinely surprised and  
2353 frightened at the rage which surfaces in us when we quit using. We have often heard a  
2354 newcomer say, in all innocence, and sincerity, "I really don't hate anyone," and, several  
2355 weeks later, heard him venting his fury against a boss or family member at a meeting. If  
2356 we don't feel anger, it is a sure sign we are covering it up in some other way. Fear and  
2357 depression are two very common masks for anger.

2358 Anger takes many forms: rage, resentment (which can be defined as anger on the  
2359 installment plan), sarcasm, envy, jealousy, cynicism, suspicion, and rigidity. When we  
2360 experience these emotions, we should be aware that we are skating on thin ice. Even  
2361 when these feelings aren't specifically connected in our minds with drugs, we have an  
2362 obligation to use the techniques of the program to deal with them. It is very common  
2363 for program members to delude themselves into thinking that as long as the anger  
2364 doesn't specifically cause them to crave drugs, they are in no danger. This is no more  
2365 than the old "All I have to do is stay clean" fallacy. We have all seen those who seemed  
2366 to be doing everything wrong in their recovery; including indulging in self-pity,  
2367 resentments, and holy wars, and who doesn't crave a drug up to the moment they  
2368 found a needle in their arm, pills in their mouth, or a drink in their hand.

2369 What about justifiable anger? What about the obvious wrongs all around us? Shouldn't  
2370 we properly express anger at these things? Such justifiable anger is a very tricky subject  
2371 for the recovering addict. We have never been very careful about distinguishing  
2372 between this kind of anger and unjustifiable anger. As we saw it, our anger was always  
2373 justified. Did any of us ever say, "Yes, I'm feeling pretty mad right now. But I really  
2374 have no reason too. It's actually my fault." Of course not! We always rationalized our  
2375 anger, and will continue to do so in our recovery. Not only can we usually not make

2376 the distinction between justifiable and unjustifiable anger, but even if we could, it is  
2377 very unlikely that we could then act on the anger in a way that would be healthy for us.

2378 Becoming involved in causes, or holy wars, has been the downfall of many recovering  
2379 addicts. The motives of these addicts were usually pure and the targets of their causes  
2380 were often well-chosen: a cruel and unfair employer, a scheming ex, a larcenous lawyer,  
2381 an insensitive government bureaucracy. The purity of their motives and the justice of  
2382 their cause did not keep these addicts from getting high for the simple reason that for  
2383 the addict, anger is part of the using Game. When we indulge in it, even for the very  
2384 best reasons, we are setting ourselves up because we are getting back into our Game.  
2385 As difficult as it is to learn to do, we must leave justifiable anger to those who are better  
2386 qualified to handle it.

2387 Let's talk first about impulsive anger. This is anger we experience on the spur of the  
2388 moment. It is a mistake at such moments to tell ourselves that we shouldn't be angry or  
2389 that the anger is unreasonable or bad for us. Giving ourselves such advice only  
2390 increases our anger. We then become angry at our anger. We have found it's more  
2391 effective to look at the actual situation that provoked the anger. More than likely it's  
2392 one of the ordinary incidents that make up our daily pattern of living. Discourteous  
2393 remarks from someone, a rude or impatient driver, are some examples. It is good for  
2394 us to spot the specific situation for what it really is. If we keep saying to ourselves, over  
2395 and over, "It's no big deal" our brain will eventually get the message, and our anger will  
2396 defuse. It really works.

2397 In the program one sometimes hears the expression "How important is it?" When we  
2398 feel rage rising in us and are overwhelmed with the desire to teach someone a lesson,  
2399 we should ask ourselves that very question. Certainly, no situation we can encounter in  
2400 everyday living is as important to us as staying clean.

2401 Many members find the Serenity Prayer and the Third Step Prayer useful for handling  
2402 anger. These, and all other such program tools, can keep us from acting on our anger,  
2403 either verbally or physically. If we allow ourselves to fight physically or argue heatedly,  
2404 we are the losers. It may take us days to bring our emotions back under control. Giving

2405 in to anger this way produces a hangover very similar to the hangovers drug use gave  
2406 us. One member said the feelings he experienced after getting in a fight were like a  
2407 meth crash.

2408 A second kind of anger is resentment. This is an ongoing anger often directed at a  
2409 person or a situation. You should recognize resentments for what they are, a threat to  
2410 your recovery. You should discuss resentments with your sponsor and talk about them  
2411 at meetings. These are two legitimate ways we have of venting our feelings. Some  
2412 meeting talk is taken up with airing the day's resentments.

2413 We are often told that the best way to handle resentment against a person is to pray for  
2414 that person. Our first reaction to such suggestion is disbelief. How can we pray for  
2415 someone when what we actually want to do is harm them? If you act on this  
2416 suggestion, however, you will be equally surprised to find it works! It acts to get the  
2417 resentment off your shoulders, to allow you to breathe easily, and to function once  
2418 again. Program members who have honestly tried praying for those they resent attest  
2419 to the fact that it works. It seems the human brain can't harbor two sets of emotions at  
2420 the same time. We can't simultaneously nurse a grudge and also ask God to safeguard  
2421 that person's welfare. It's not necessary for you to come up with a long, elaborate, and,  
2422 probably, dishonest prayer. Try something simple, like, "God, your will be done for  
2423 \_\_\_\_\_ not mine."

2424 When you talk to your sponsor about your resentments, they may make some  
2425 observations that you will find unwelcome. They may want you to discuss your role in  
2426 the situation that provoked your resentment. This may give rise to resentment; you've  
2427 gone to your sponsor for sympathy and support, and now it's your mistakes that are  
2428 being pointed out. If this happens, try to be open-minded, to recall that you have not  
2429 always been above board with yourself in this respect. We seldom owned our own  
2430 mistakes, usually preferring to blame someone or something else. We must become  
2431 responsible for our behavior. Your sponsor isn't there to please you; they are there to  
2432 help you.

2433 If your resentments continue to be an impediment to your growth and happiness, it  
2434 probably means you have to face up to some hard decisions. You may have to quit a  
2435 job, get out of a marriage, and move to another part of town. But it's far more  
2436 preferable for you to make such a decision than face the consequences of not doing so.  
2437 Your life is at stake.

2438 It's undoubtedly true that anger is the enemy of growth, but also growth is the enemy  
2439 of anger. As you stay clean, you will notice that your tolerance increases. Situations  
2440 which would have sent you into a rage in early recovery are felt only as an annoyance  
2441 later in recovery. A lot of your anger, particularly your spontaneous anger, is a  
2442 symptom of the tension produced by drug withdrawal. Another kind of anger is caused  
2443 by your feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, and self-loathing. As you acquire more  
2444 self-worth and get to know yourself better; the source for this kind of anger will  
2445 diminish.

2446 Physical exercise is a healthy way to redirect your anger.

## 2447 **Self-pity**

2448 Self-pity is something that we hardly ever want to admit we are feeling. We have in our  
2449 addiction mastered the art of hiding self-pity even from ourselves and that habit we  
2450 carry over into recovery. We may, for instance, tell ourselves that we are just trying to  
2451 take a realistic survey of our situation and have honestly come to the conclusion that  
2452 life hasn't given us a fair shake. Our reasons vary. We had a bad childhood, we didn't  
2453 get a high school education, an important love affair didn't work out, our parents died  
2454 when we were young, we were sexually abused, we were born into the wrong  
2455 neighborhood, social class or family. As many factors as there are that make up the  
2456 human situation we can pick out to feel sorry for ourselves.

2457 Like other traits of immaturity, self-pity provides us with a way to be self-absorbed, to  
2458 keep ourselves apart from the rest of the human race, and to deny responsibility for  
2459 our recovery. After all, how can we expect any determination to get well from a person

2460 whom life has treated so unfairly? We see this in some addicts who insist on being  
2461 “sick” or being “disabled”. They program themselves for failure.

2462 More than anything else, self-pity is a sort of willful spiritual blindness. We stubbornly  
2463 refuse to see that God distributes good and bad to all alike. Most of us can think of  
2464 instances such as the street vendor who is severely disabled but who is incessantly  
2465 happy and cheerful on the one hand, and on the other the young heir of a wealthy  
2466 family who has everything but commits suicide. It’s not the situation we are placed in  
2467 but our response to it that indicates how happy we are going to be.

2468 Like most of our other negative emotions, we indulge in self-pity for ulterior purposes.  
2469 First, it takes the pressure off us to start making all these scary changes people in the  
2470 program are trying to get us to make, and secondly, it keeps us dangerous close to our  
2471 Game. The belief that the world sucks or that we got all the bad breaks was usually  
2472 quite necessary for our coping and using drugs. How else could we excuse an act so  
2473 clearly self-destructive?

2474 One subtle form self-pity takes is when we endlessly attempt to uncover the “real  
2475 causes” of our addiction. We are sometimes aided in this effort by misguided  
2476 counselors of the analytical persuasion. Since each new decade ushers in a new  
2477 psychoanalytic theory about addiction, we in the Narcotics Anonymous program think  
2478 it is premature to pin our hopes for recovery on any one of them, in particular, on a  
2479 therapy which promises to ferret out the true reasons for our addiction. Which of us  
2480 really believed the explanations any of the analysts gave us? More importantly, how  
2481 long did all those theories keep us clean?

2482 Another form of self-pity occurs when we exaggerate the importance of a trivial  
2483 situation. A large and unexpected bill means we will be forever in debt. A date goes  
2484 against our expectations and we feel we will never be able to function normally in  
2485 social situations or get the sexual closeness we want. How often have we heard a  
2486 person in the program whine, “I’ll never get laid.” If we act this way we are once again  
2487 expressing distrust in God’s timetable for our recovery.

2488 Naturally, we don't like to have our self-pity pointed out to us. Like the child in a sulk,  
2489 we may reject all comforting. One newcomer that was accused of feeling sorry for  
2490 themselves angrily replied, "I have to. None of you would feel sorry for me!"

2491 Traveling down memory lane is a sure way to end up in the pity party. At this point in  
2492 our recovery, none of us has learned to handle the past objectively. We end up pulling  
2493 out our old duffle bag and lovingly caressing all the hurts of the past, the childhood  
2494 embarrassments, the broken romances, the quarrels we could have won had we only  
2495 said such-and-such. These excursions into the past are often accompanied by our  
2496 favorite dry music played on the stereo.

2497 What happens eventually is that we get sick from wandering in the bag of self-pity, fed  
2498 up with being so much into our own problems. It's a little bit like living inside a  
2499 garment bag. If we really take our recovery seriously, we will soon reach out to others  
2500 and admit that our binge of emotion was self-pity. Perhaps we'll enjoy a good laugh at  
2501 ourselves as we recount the episode at a meeting.

2502 The best cure for self-pity is gratitude. If we develop the daily habit of gratitude and  
2503 make a business of gratitude, rather than just an occasional effort, our problems with  
2504 self-pity will take care of themselves. We will learn to look at life's ledger a little more  
2505 realistically. We always feel a little embarrassed at our self-pitying behavior when an  
2506 objective self-inventory brings home to us how unbelievably lucky we are. Gratitude is  
2507 one of the most therapeutic side-effects of our recovery work.

2508 As we continue to stay clean, we will come to have faith in the timetable of our  
2509 recovery. We will quit stressing about what we don't have and realize that, though we  
2510 may not always get what we want, we always get what we need.

## 2511 **Other addictions: work, gambling, compulsive sex**

2512 We have already pointed out how easily the addict can transfer their addiction from  
2513 one drug to another. Our experience has shown us that addicts can also easily fall into  
2514 certain patterns of behavior almost addictively. The effect of these activities is to

2515 separate us from the program and its spiritual resources, and ultimately to jeopardize  
2516 our staying clean.

2517 The new member, who maintains a healthy system of daily self-inventory via the Tenth  
2518 Step, will discover that much of his behavior has overtones of addiction in it. For  
2519 instance, consider carrying out a personal vendetta. If we plot to take revenge on a  
2520 person or institution, we will encounter a familiar complex of feelings and thoughts.  
2521 First of all, our thinking will tend to become obsession. All of our waking moments  
2522 will be filled with the details of the plan. We will notice our hearts beating faster at the  
2523 thought that justice will finally be ours. Then there is the ultimate crash when some  
2524 aspect of the plan goes wrong or we lose interest in it. What are these other than the  
2525 symptoms of thought and feeling that coping gave us? We must learn to recognize  
2526 patterns for what they are. We are still playing the old Game again with different pieces.

2527 So many are the ways that we can behave addictively that one member said, "Every  
2528 week I find a new addiction I have to deal with." However, we shouldn't be  
2529 discouraged that so much of the using person is still with us. The program offers us a  
2530 very effective way to keep our addictive natures at bay.

2531 Although there are other problems, particularly food addiction, in this section we want  
2532 to discuss three particular forms of addictive behavior. Work, gambling, and sex have  
2533 spelled great trouble for many of our members.

2534 It's easy for us to convince ourselves that total absorption in our work is healthy. For  
2535 so many years we were irresponsible and half-hearted employers or employees, or  
2536 perhaps couldn't even hold down a job. Now, with the gift of recovery, we have the  
2537 chance to do things right. We may find ourselves working excessive hours, taking work  
2538 home with us, and even working over the weekend. The ex-addict who has become a  
2539 workaholic is often devastated when the time for vacation comes around, and may  
2540 even resist going on a vacation. What are they going to do with their time? Without the  
2541 structure that the addiction to work gave them, they find themselves becoming  
2542 depressed.



2543 The workaholic lifestyle violates a fundamental principle of recovery. We seek to attain  
2544 moderation, not excess, in all the areas of our recovery. We must devote time to  
2545 friendships, to learning how to play, to the development of our talents, as well as to our  
2546 work. When we neglect any of these areas of our lives, we are a danger to our  
2547 emotional stability.

2548 We think it is extremely important for the recovering addict to learn how to play. Not  
2549 only human beings, but all creatures, find play enjoyable. Play in humans takes many  
2550 forms. From board games to organized team sports, but they all fulfill the same  
2551 purpose. In play we lose our obsessional concern with ourselves. Part of the fun of play  
2552 is to be able to laugh at our own mistakes. One member said that one of the most  
2553 exciting experiences of her recovery was playing volleyball with other program people  
2554 at a conference. Through the humor and vitality of the game, the players seemed to be  
2555 re-affirming their bond as recovering addicts.

2556 The workaholic rejects such pleasures. Everything for the workaholic is deadly serious.  
2557 Spontaneity, the true essence of play, finds no place in life. Work has become a coffin,  
2558 because like all true addicts the workaholic has deadened feelings. In addition,  
2559 overwork undermines any reasonable meeting schedule and pushes the program out of  
2560 the workaholic's life. Unfortunately, the workaholic usually won't listen to the warning  
2561 advice of sponsor or program friends. As was the case with drugs, the workaholic  
2562 justifies an addictive lifestyle by an endless series of excuses such as, "I just have this  
2563 one more project to get out of the way and then I'll get back to meetings." There is  
2564 always another project up ahead. What the workaholic is really telling us is that he or  
2565 she has discovered something more important than staying clean. If the workaholic  
2566 persists in this idea, the result is predictable.

2567 Gambling is another pitfall for the recovering addict. More than almost any other  
2568 nondrug oriented obsessional activity, gambling can spell instant ruin for us. We  
2569 believe that the following warning accurately summarizes our group experience. The  
2570 recovering addict should heed caution. To us the risks outweigh any conceivable  
2571 benefits. The experience of compulsive gamblers tells us that gambling is a way of

2572 satisfying certain deeply felt masochistic needs. Drug addicts have an abundance of such  
2573 needs. It often seemed that in our addiction we were intentionally seeking pain.  
2574 Recovering addicts are a set-up for a gambling problem. Some of us have indulged in  
2575 such innocent-seeming activities as purchasing lottery tickets. We found that these  
2576 activities opened up emotions which seemed to be the same feelings coping gave us.  
2577 With awareness we recognized the danger and stopped. However, as is the case with  
2578 any other compulsive activity, it is easier not to start gambling than it is to stop.

2579 Sex can become another way of avoiding reality. We can easily make the search for sex  
2580 a new and all-consuming Game. When we add the element of romance, we have a truly  
2581 potent and addictive mixture. We use the sex/romance mixture to change our moods  
2582 and to provide excitement, just as we did with drugs.

2583 Our members find sex so readily available, casual sex for us may become a major  
2584 problem. It poses special hazards. Casual sex may be used by a member as a way of  
2585 putting themselves and others down. Exploiting our bodies seeking relief only to find  
2586 we are actually selling ourselves leaving us feeling emptier than before.

2587 Another point for us to keep in mind is that some of us feel a measure of guilt about  
2588 casual sex and will keep our behavior a secret from others. For the recovering addict  
2589 secretive behavior is always dangerous.

2590 Narcotics Anonymous is not anti-sex. We see the experience of developing healthy  
2591 sexual relationships as an important and pleasurable element of our recovery. As with  
2592 many aspects of our recovery, we strive for moderation. Sex should occupy its  
2593 proper place in our lives. Sex should not be used as a weapon.

2594 There are a number of human resource groups that can help the recovering addict deal  
2595 with other addictive behavior problems. Any outside source of help should be  
2596 evaluated in terms of our own priority of staying clean.

## 2597 **Getting into therapy**

2598 The decision of whether or not to seek the help of a professional counselor is one  
2599 many of us in the program have made. Some of us have benefited from counseling.  
2600 However, there are also dangers which we will want to avoid. In this section we  
2601 explore some of the benefits and risks of the subject.

2602 The view of Narcotics Anonymous toward therapy is open minded and tolerant. We  
2603 may hear at a meeting a remark such as “and my therapist told me. . . .” Many of our  
2604 members came out of rehabs, in which some form of psychological counseling was  
2605 part of the treatment program, and have continued with that therapy until the present  
2606 day.

2607 A member of Narcotics Anonymous may seek counseling for any number of reasons.  
2608 Fear, anxiety, or depression are some of the examples in which a member may seek  
2609 therapy. Emotional instabilities sometime occur early in the program. They are often  
2610 the inevitable symptoms of making the adjustment to a life without drugs.

2611 Some of us contemplate getting counseling later in our recovery because we find  
2612 ourselves stuck and want the therapist to guide us onto new ground. We feel we need  
2613 an outsider to take an objective and experienced look at our living patterns and to  
2614 make concrete suggestions. In such situations, the help a counselor provides can be  
2615 very useful. Viewing the counselor as a guide who walks along with but perhaps a little  
2616 ahead of their client is a healthy attitude to take. We should be cautious of seeking  
2617 counseling because we want a surrogate father, mother, or some other authority figure  
2618 in our lives.

2619 What should you look for in a counselor? Most important of all, they should take a  
2620 realistic view of addicts, their problems, and understand that staying clean has to be the  
2621 primary goal. Many of the therapists who work in or are associated with rehabs have  
2622 such an understanding of addiction. Also, a growing number of therapists are  
2623 themselves members of the program.

2624 A therapist who cannot understand why you shouldn't use mind-altering mood-  
2625 changing drugs in moderation or who wants to pin-point the "causes" for your  
2626 addiction is one to avoid. We have no direct quarrel with the views of such therapists,  
2627 but they are not the therapists for us. They may be able to help some of their clients,  
2628 but we are so unnerved by having to cope with their views about addiction that we  
2629 can't benefit from even their good advice.

2630 The same is true for medical marijuana. Although society is finally recognizing the  
2631 medical benefits of marijuana, we need to remember that we are addicts. For us weed is  
2632 just another tool we use to avoid facing life on life's terms and dealing with our  
2633 emotions. Remember, there are medical uses for narcotics, amphetamines, and such.  
2634 That does not mean we take them just because a well-meaning physician, uneducated  
2635 in addiction, believes that a pill will solve our problem. For we know, probably better  
2636 than most, that thinking a pill will solve our problem actually is our problem!

2637 Some therapists, psychiatrists, and doctors who are legally qualified to dispense  
2638 medication become convinced that to every emotional problem there is a  
2639 pharmaceutical solution. As the saying goes, "If your only tool is a hammer, then every  
2640 problem becomes a nail." We must be very wary of treatment by such medical  
2641 professionals. For recovering addicts many medications have great potential for abuse.  
2642 Many doctors are still blind to these dangers and a recovering addict who takes such is  
2643 playing with fire. Rather than getting into a therapy program which involves the use of  
2644 any drugs, we strongly suggest you investigate one of the lay treatment groups. These  
2645 programs are drug-free and those of our members who have tried them have found  
2646 them to be tremendously effective in helping them to overcome a host of different  
2647 emotional complaints, such as phobias, anxiety attacks and depression. Some of our  
2648 members continue to be active in such programs throughout their recovery. One  
2649 member whose claustrophobia was so severe that he couldn't get in an elevator or in  
2650 an airplane found himself completely relieved of his symptom after attending an  
2651 outside therapeutic group meetings for a year, and his experience seems to be typical.

2652 Some of our members hold very negative views about medical doctors as therapists  
2653 and would advise against going into therapy with a psychiatrist. Of course, there are  
2654 many exceptions. One member recalls going to a psychiatrist who threw him out of his  
2655 office shouting, “You’re a drug addict, that’s your problem! Go to Narcotics  
2656 Anonymous. Come back here when you’ve been clean six months!”

2657 When seeking a therapist pay particular attention to the Narcotics Anonymous  
2658 members who have had successful experiences with therapy. Before you commit  
2659 yourself to any therapy, remember you have a right to know your therapist’s views  
2660 about addiction. You and the therapist should define the goals of your therapy and  
2661 agree on a reasonable time limit for the therapy. Therapy should not be an open ended  
2662 affair. Talking with your future therapist frankly and openly about such matters is good  
2663 training in assertiveness.

2664

## 2665 **Healthy eating habits and exercise**

2666 We have stressed that addiction is a three-fold disease: mental, physical, spiritual. Much  
2667 of our experience has dealt with the first and last two of these. In this section we  
2668 discuss how to deal with the physical part of the disease through two powerful tools:  
2669 healthy eating habits and exercise.

2670 The mention of these two words may make us cringe. In our addiction, diet and  
2671 exercise received attention only as we could work them around our drug use. As our  
2672 addiction progressed, they received less and less attention. Our disregard for our basic  
2673 physical condition coupled with the devastation that drugs produced left us physically  
2674 wrecked. But now, staying clean, we have a chance to undo the damage. Those of us in  
2675 the program who have intelligently followed a plan for exercise and diet feel we are  
2676 now in better physical shape than ever before.

2677 The process of physically rebuilding ourselves, like so much else in the program is  
2678 work. But it is necessary if we are to enjoy a full measure of self-respect. We have to

2679 face ourselves in the mirror every day. If we accept the appearance of the person we  
2680 see there, it's easier to learn the habit of self-respect which is so essential to our mental  
2681 well-being.

2682 We can't claim to advise you on "the diet" or "the exercise plan" to follow. We can  
2683 share our experience, remember that nothing can be accomplished overnight.  
2684 Moderation is the backbone of any intelligent plan. As addicts, we tend to take  
2685 everything to extremes trying to make up for lost time. We need to remember that the  
2686 idea of physical recovery must be approached with moderation and patience. Don't be  
2687 disappointed by your performance. Give yourself a break.

2688 If we are to enjoy a measure of physical health we can no longer consider our bodies as  
2689 repositories for junk food. Like any other important aspect of our lives, diet must be  
2690 planned and eating can no longer be done on impulse or simply when it is convenient.

2691 Sailing into the day with a head full of coffee and an empty stomach is a sure invitation  
2692 to a later crash. Anger, short-temperedness, depression and binges of self-will can be  
2693 some of the mental results of ignoring the need for nutrition.

2694 Many people in the program use vitamin and mineral supplements. These are a matter  
2695 of personal discretion. If used, they should be used in moderation, since even  
2696 something as innocent as vitamin supplements can develop into a compulsive  
2697 indulgence.

2698 Food can affect your mood and energy levels. As you continue to assume responsibility  
2699 for the body you live in, you will develop a sixth sense about your physical response to  
2700 various foods, to what and how much you eat. Your body will become an ally in your  
2701 recovery.

2702 Eating can also be a rewarding social event. Try to plan for as many of your meals to  
2703 be spent with program people as you can. Meals can be important occasions for  
2704 sharing and fellowship.

2705 Exercise can be a unique method for releasing day-to-day tension and frustration.  
2706 Exercise can also provide a means for socializing. Many program members are into  
2707 activities such as volleyball, kayaking, camping, jogging, weight lifting, basketball and  
2708 swimming. Planning such activities with program members is a way of strengthening  
2709 our commitment to the fellowship.

2710 Exercise acts to increase our self-esteem, not only because it makes us look and feel  
2711 better, but because it provides tangible evidence that we can set goals and develop a  
2712 program to meet them. Physically exercise builds cardiovascular stamina, develops  
2713 muscle tone, and releases endorphins. All of which contribute to our physical well-  
2714 being.

2715 It is important to set goals you can fulfill whatever exercise you chose. Ten minutes of  
2716 jogging actually accomplished is better than a grandiose scheme for a half hour of  
2717 jogging which you cannot even attempt because it intimidates you. Start small, there is  
2718 no way to get in shape overnight. Above all, be assertive. Ask around. Seek the advice  
2719 and support of those who are into what you are trying to do. It is a way of meeting new  
2720 friends. Generally people who are physically active are happy to share their experience.  
2721 Those into weight-lifting are usually happy to help you develop a lifting plan. Pool  
2722 lifeguards are usually accommodating about giving the novice swimmer pointers. Aside  
2723 from the direct physical benefits exercise gives us, the opportunity to work with others  
2724 yields many beneficial side effects.

## 2725 **Changes**

2726 There are some expressions in the program, “If the only thing you do is don’t use, then  
2727 you’ll use” and “if nothing changes, nothing changes.” These expressions indicate  
2728 recovering addicts are simply too sick to survive without making changes. We have  
2729 found those changes must take place in all areas of our lives.

2730 Before coming into the Narcotics Anonymous program, many of us tried at one time  
2731 or another to stay clean without making changes in our lives. After staying off drugs for  
2732 a period of time, we began to feel better physically. As the newness of staying clean

2733 wore off was that our lives began to seem empty and meaningless. There seemed to be  
2734 no direction and nothing to work toward. Eventually, we come to view the prospect of  
2735 living life without drugs terrifying. Being essentially the same people we were when we  
2736 had stopped using and having no defense against taking the first drug, we used again.  
2737 Looking back on such experiences we see now that we really had no choice. We had  
2738 no program to help us deal with our addiction. We had vastly underestimated the  
2739 extent of our sickness.

2740 Quitting doesn't count. As Mark Twain said, "Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it a  
2741 thousand times." It's staying quit that's the problem. To do this we need to make  
2742 sweeping changes in our lives. Specifically, we must make changes in our attitudes and  
2743 in our behavior.

2744 Drug addiction has been called a disease of attitudes. If we are to have any success at  
2745 staying clean over the long run and finding the happy life we all want we should work  
2746 on changing our attitudes.

2747 One of the first habits we must work to change is the habit of seeing ourselves as  
2748 outsiders, outside society, outside the law. We must begin to think of ourselves as  
2749 useful, contributing members of society, sharing with all others in our society certain  
2750 social and emotional needs. The mindset, "me against the world," has to be  
2751 abandoned, as difficult as it is to do. We came to see the idea that we expressed our  
2752 individual differences through the use of drugs as a myth. When we begin to see the  
2753 drug culture for what it actually is, a culture of bondage, we will have made great  
2754 progress. If we are clean we aren't controlled by the ways and means to get more. Our  
2755 opportunities are virtually unlimited. For the first time we have a chance at true joy.

2756 Another attitude that has to be changed is the attitude of secretiveness. Along with  
2757 making decisions to stay away from a drug one day at a time, we make the decision to  
2758 share our thoughts and feelings with others. Only in this way can we avoid a return to  
2759 drug oriented behavior.



2760 We have to make behavioral changes. We have to stay away from drugs, paraphernalia,  
2761 people, places, and things who were involved in our using. It is equally important to  
2762 make other changes, develop the habit of acting out of self-respect rather than self-  
2763 loathing, to learn listen, to acquire the habit of acting against our impulsiveness and  
2764 compulsiveness. Our recovery will be very precarious if we do not learn to avoid acting  
2765 out verbally and physically with our anger. One member, whose experience is echoed  
2766 by many others, said that most of his growth came from learning to keep his mouth  
2767 shut at the right times. If we have not developed our assertiveness sufficiently to  
2768 express our needs in a given situation without anger, then the next best thing is to  
2769 “turn the situation over.” This really means we decide not to speak or act angrily.

2770 One of the main benefits of taking Steps Four through Seven is that by doing so we  
2771 devise a clear plan for making the changes needed. Until we do this, we may not have  
2772 much of a sense of what needs to be done. It is never too early to start making  
2773 behavioral changes. Some sponsors advise making small changes just for the sake of  
2774 making changes. For example, if you usually wash your face before brushing your  
2775 teeth, reverse the order. Or try driving a different way to or from work or a meeting.  
2776 Such suggestions may sound trivial but they can accomplish two very nontrivial  
2777 changes in your attitudes. They will commit you to the concept of a new life built  
2778 through change and they will demonstrate that you are not ruled completely by your  
2779 old habits.

2780 Obviously some of our attitudes and behavior will be easier to change than others.  
2781 Some changes we will resist very strongly. But our “Never” attitude must be changed  
2782 to a “Never Say Never” attitude. If you find yourself saying “This I cannot give up,”  
2783 try adding an open-minded “yet” to the end of the sentence.

## 2784 **Social Media**

2785 Narcotics Anonymous members who choose to work an anonymous program have  
2786 always guarded their status as a member of NA with great care. This is for the benefit  
2787 of the Fellowship as well as the member. For example, if a member was on TV

2788 boasting of the benefits of NA stating that they represented NA, and then later were  
2789 found dead or using, the NA public image would be tarnished. For this reason, our  
2790 anonymity also protects our Fellowship.

2791 Our Traditions, specifically the 11th Tradition states “Our public relations policy is  
2792 based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal  
2793 anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.” What is implied here based on newer  
2794 technologies is the use of the Internet and digital technologies.

2795 In the recent past, the term “addict” was viewed negatively by society as someone  
2796 hopelessly addicted and unable to recover. Society now understands that We Do  
2797 Recover with many people having a relative, friend, or acquaintance with close ties to  
2798 someone in recovery. Many addicts choose to work an anonymous program, which is  
2799 completely their choice. As addicts we must respect the program of another.

2800 We know from experience if a potential newcomer, or someone who thinks they may  
2801 have a problem with drugs, believes that their anonymity will be violated, they may be  
2802 reluctant to attend an NA meeting seeking the help they so desperately need.

2803 Therefore, we can see how Anonymity serves two purposes:

2804 1) At the Personal level, anonymity protects all members from being identified as  
2805 addicts. The old timers, new comers, and those seeking solutions for active addiction  
2806 are all equal.

2807 2) At the Public level, anonymity supports our Traditions allowing all addicts to  
2808 be equal. No one is put above or below the other. This keeps us safe from the  
2809 seduction of money, property, and prestige as we are not tempted to exploit the NA  
2810 brand for personal gain.

2811 When using Social Media, we NA members are responsible for protecting our  
2812 anonymity as well as the anonymity of others. For example, taking a picture of friends  
2813 at a convention and posting this on a Social Media platform breaks the anonymity of all

2814 parties involved. This includes people in the background who are not a part of the  
2815 picture group, but who can be identified in the picture.

2816 Today, social networking websites are public in nature. Many NA members that use  
2817 social media are identified by their full name, as well as a profile picture. Often Private  
2818 groups are created in which many NA members join and comment on NA topics.  
2819 When NA members use a Public platform, the media company owns all of the data.  
2820 Therefore every comment ever made, even if deleted, and every picture ever posted is  
2821 public domain, owned by the social media company.

2822 When we use digital media, we are responsible for our own anonymity and that of  
2823 others. Some social media platforms even track when we are simply viewing some  
2824 content. When we comment, reply, post, text, or blog, we should assume that we are  
2825 publishing at the public level, even if the group is categorized as private. When we  
2826 break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of  
2827 others.

2828 For our own anonymity, some members have created their own NA profile on social  
2829 media, which consist of not using their real last names and not posting their pictures on  
2830 social media. This allows them to stay anonymous. They also do not announce in  
2831 writing that they are NA members, or that they represent the NA Fellowship. We do  
2832 not speak for NA, we can only speak for ourselves.

2833 As long as we do not identify ourselves as NA members, there is no conflict of interest.  
2834 However, someone posting a picture with an identifiable face, and using their full  
2835 name, would violate the spirit of our 11th Tradition which states “Our public relations  
2836 policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal  
2837 anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films” which also implies the use of Social  
2838 Media.

## 2839 **Getting into the Steps**

2840 By attending the meetings and getting involved in the fellowship of Narcotics  
2841 Anonymous we no longer feel we are waging a solitary battle to stay clean. We know  
2842 others have done it, and we begin to believe we can learn from their experience and  
2843 direction. The relief we experience with coming into Narcotics Anonymous, and  
2844 discovering that others have been where we are and have survived, is enormous. We  
2845 find we are loved and accepted for what we are, not for what we have pretended to be.  
2846 No one is shocked by our past. In fact, we are encouraged to talk about it.

2847 We may experience a sense of elation that lasts weeks or even months. Sometimes this  
2848 feeling is called “being on a pink cloud.” The implication is that, as all clouds must  
2849 eventually disperse, so the pink cloud must come to an end. During this initial period  
2850 of euphoria it seems that staying clean requires almost no effort. Every day is like a new  
2851 experience. But sooner or later reality intrudes. The initial euphoria, enjoyable as it was,  
2852 comes to an end. We may find ourselves bent out of shape with anger, resentments,  
2853 anxieties, all those demons we thought we had left behind with our using. One of our  
2854 resentments is that the good feelings didn’t last. What did we, or the program, do  
2855 wrong? “It’s not fair!” we howl.

2856 At this point we begin to discover that staying clean involves work. We can’t stay clean  
2857 on the good vibes of the fellowship alone.

2858 Naturally, if we experience this letdown, we want to know what to do. Our sponsors or  
2859 others in the program then begin to suggest that we apply the principles found in the  
2860 Steps into our lives.

## 2861 **What are the Steps?**

2862 Think of building a clean life for yourself as you would think of building a house. As  
2863 mortar, brick, wood, nails, sheetrock, and a solid foundation are to a house, so must  
2864 the Steps be to your recovery. No materials, no house; no Steps, no lasting recovery.  
2865 It’s that simple.

2866 The Twelve Steps assist us to change us as a person. If we only stay clean and not  
2867 work the program we go from being sick using addicts to sick non-using addicts.  
2868 Addiction does not come in packets, pills, or bottles. It comes in us. We are damaged  
2869 people and it's unrealistic to pretend otherwise. We are isolated, out of touch with  
2870 ourselves, others, and God. To survive we need to reorganize our inner and outer lives.  
2871 The Steps help us to accomplish that.

2872 The Steps are written in a way that is simple and easy to understand. The principles  
2873 embodied in them are not new. The basic ideas behind the Steps are even older, and  
2874 occur in many religions and spiritual orders of the world.

2875 In summary, the Steps help us to do four things. We come to acceptance of who we  
2876 were. We find humility for who we are. We establish a spiritual basis for living. We  
2877 prepare ourselves for a life of service.

2878 The First Step requires us to admit we are powerless over our addiction, and that our  
2879 lives had become unmanageable. It is the one Step we must begin to work as soon as  
2880 we come into Narcotics Anonymous. We continue to work the First Step each and  
2881 every day of our life. Whenever we identify with a speaker at a meeting, or speak  
2882 ourselves, we are working the First Step. Every time we help a still suffering addict, the  
2883 gratitude that we experience for our own recovery is actually work done on the First  
2884 Step. The admission of powerlessness over our addiction must be complete. There can  
2885 be no reservations such as "Well, meth did get me in a lot of trouble; but pot, that's  
2886 something else." We must admit and accept the indisputable fact that our addiction  
2887 was in us, not in the drugs. We are powerless over all mind-altering mood-changing  
2888 substances. As we continue to stay clean more will be revealed, and we get a clearer  
2889 idea of how using drugs was central to our life. We lived to use and used to live.

2890 The First Step says "I can't." The Second Step says "God can." The Third Step says "if  
2891 I let Him." In the Second Step we are asked to believe that a power greater than  
2892 ourselves can restore us to sanity. How do we come by this belief that we can get well?  
2893 How do we decide something can happen which is contrary to all our experience?  
2894 With us events always went from bad to worse; they never seemed to go the other way.

2895 The Second Step requires us to believe in hope and to have faith. One spiritual teacher  
2896 called faith “the evidence of things not seen.” In fact, if we had proof of something,  
2897 believing it would require no faith at all. Nevertheless, in Narcotics Anonymous we are  
2898 provided with a kind of proof. If you look around, you will see people who were once  
2899 where you are, and who are now staying clean.

2900 As we continue to stay clean we will encounter many living problems which, like drugs,  
2901 cannot be solved by the application of will power alone. We may find ourselves  
2902 devastated by an emotional crisis, exhausted by an ongoing temperamental conflict  
2903 with a fellow employee, or emotionally caught up in the recovery of someone we are  
2904 sponsoring. When we are new everything seems to be a crisis. “Life is,” as a  
2905 philosopher put it, “a bed of hot coals with a cool spot here and there.” The Third Step  
2906 worked on a daily basis allows such matters to be taken out of our hands. In any  
2907 situation we do the best we can do and leave the rest to God. Our recovery is no  
2908 longer our own project. ☺

2909 Step Four enables us at last to come to terms with our past, and with who we are.  
2910 Opinions differ on how soon after coming into the program the newcomer should  
2911 start on this Step. It is usually suggested that the inventory this Step requires should be  
2912 done with pen and paper. Vague inventories like, “Yeah, I was a little dishonest,” will  
2913 inevitably result in a lot of self-deceit. How long could a grocer, for instance, stay in  
2914 business if he conducted his yearly inventory just by talking to himself? “I see some  
2915 cans of tomatoes over there, and here’s some detergent.” In fact, the comparison of  
2916 taking the Fourth Step to a business inventory is a fairly accurate one. It should be  
2917 done dispassionately, that is, without a lot of self-blame. It should be written down. It  
2918 may be done more than once. Some members do the Fourth Step at a fixed time every  
2919 year.

2920 Taking the Fourth Step can be stressful. You should have all your supports available  
2921 when taking it. Stay in close touch with meetings, your network, and your sponsor.

2922 When we get our inventory down on paper, the result is empowering. We begin to see  
2923 for the first time ourselves as we really are. There’s some bad in us, and a lot more

2924 good than we had ever thought. We finally come to recognize ourselves as human  
2925 beings. It is the beginning of the end of our isolation. The walls are coming down and  
2926 the masks are coming off.

2927 However, if we stop the inventory process at the Fourth Step, our task of discovering  
2928 that we are human isn't complete. We haven't used what we've found to reach out to  
2929 others, to build a bond with the rest of the human race. We may have a better idea of  
2930 who we are, but we may still feel unique, isolated, and unforgiveable.

2931 It is in taking the Fifth Step that we put these fears to rest. We reveal to God,  
2932 ourselves, and another human being the "exact nature of our wrongs." For example,  
2933 those facts about ourselves we have uncovered in our Fourth Step inventory. We know  
2934 what we have found and sought God's guidance in the inventory taking. What remains  
2935 is to tell "another human being." Who? It should be someone you trust, can keep what  
2936 is said in confidence, and has been through the process.

2937 Many of us have found it beneficial to work the Fifth Step with our sponsor. By  
2938 working the first three Steps with our sponsor, we have learned if they are trustworthy.  
2939 We have already built a foundation of trust. Most importantly we are providing our  
2940 sponsor more information about us. They will know us, our motives, and what drives  
2941 us at a much deeper level. This information allows our sponsor to help us more in our  
2942 recovery as we continue in the Steps. It has been our experience that the more our  
2943 sponsors know us, the more they can help us to see ourselves and grow in our  
2944 recovery.

2945 The Fifth Step is privileged information. Be certain the person you have chosen knows  
2946 what you are requiring of them. This should be a very structured event. Plan to go  
2947 somewhere you both will be alone and undisturbed for several hours.

2948 You shouldn't worry too much about whether what you reveal on the Fifth Step will  
2949 be kept in confidence. It undoubtedly will, but that is probably not the only or even the  
2950 best reason the communication is considered privileged. The taking of the Step is an

2951 act of self-respect on both your parts. You are an adult worthy of privacy. The other  
2952 person shows they are mature enough to decline the temptation to gossip.

2953 As someone once said, “if ever there is a time for courage in the program, this is it.”  
2954 With fear and trepidation one newcomer asked his sponsor how he should begin the  
2955 step. “It’s easy,” was the answer. “Just think of two or three things you told yourself  
2956 you could never tell anyone, and tell them first.” Some of us expect to be denounced,  
2957 consoled, or pitied for being so sick. These things do not happen. Usually the  
2958 respondent listens politely, may occasionally ask for clarification, and may share one of  
2959 their own experiences. This is to let you know you aren’t alone.

2960 Those who have taken the Fifth Step may compare it with several things. One said it is  
2961 like being handed water after being on the desert all your life. Another said that it is like  
2962 finally breaking out of a glass prison. We recovering addicts find the Fifth Step one of  
2963 the most baffling, frightening, intimidating, exciting and exhilarating events of our lives.  
2964 Once we take it we can never be the same again. We close the door on the old life.

2965 More than anything else, the Fourth and Fifth Steps give us a direction in which to  
2966 travel. We will know what our strengths and weaknesses are. Now the real work  
2967 begins. The Sixth and Seventh Steps provide us with a systematic way of changing. We  
2968 have discovered that we cannot continue to barge recklessly through life, using other  
2969 people and venting our immaturity on everyone around us and still stay clean. If we do  
2970 not grow, we die. We must work to rid ourselves of anger, resentments, vengefulness,  
2971 being judgmental, blaming others for our problems, impatience, self-pity, and all the  
2972 other defects of character that are the inevitable result of a using life. We must  
2973 rediscover gentleness, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, and love. We must learn to  
2974 extend ourselves to others and allow ourselves to be nurtured by others.

2975 We must abandoned the idea that we can be possessively jealous of a few, indifferent  
2976 to the many, and the sworn enemy of anyone. Every time we say “No!” to the worse  
2977 part of us, it gives us a measure of self-respect. The result of self-improvement is not  
2978 only the way we stay clean, but also it is a form of self-love.



2979 Steps Eight and Nine help us put the past in its proper place. The past need never  
2980 haunt you again. A great deal of damage, to yourself and others, may be done by a  
2981 premature attempt to right the wrongs of the past. Your efforts to make restitution and  
2982 amends, for instance, to other players of your Game, usually won't be understood,  
2983 This may even involve you getting in touch with your Game again, a dangerous  
2984 business. Unless we have a little time in the program, we won't have a clear idea of how  
2985 amends should be made. However, during your first year, you can do something on  
2986 these steps. Compile a mental list of those you have wronged, for example, and ask  
2987 others in the program how they have come to terms with their pasts. You should avail  
2988 yourself of your sponsor's experience before you start beginning either of these Steps.

2989 The Tenth Step is a continual daily basis application of the Fourth Step inventory. It  
2990 provides us with a way of righting our daily mistakes by admitting them. We  
2991 "continued to take personal inventory and when wrong, promptly admitted it." Why  
2992 admit a wrong rather than apologize for it? Our apologies are often required but they  
2993 are of no value unless they are preceded by an honest admission to ourselves that we  
2994 have erred. Saying "we're sorry" became meaningless words as we repeatedly abused  
2995 the saying and continued to judge and blame others for our mistakes. The Tenth Step  
2996 requires a totally different approach to the problem of righting wrongs. We begin by  
2997 recognizing our own role in our behavior. The time for blaming others is past. We  
2998 learn to take total responsibility for our own lives.

2999 The tenth step allows us to make ourselves accountable for our behavior. If we know  
3000 that a mistake will require an admission of wrong to ourselves and then an apology to  
3001 someone else, we are less likely to indulge in extravagant and childish behavior. Many  
3002 program members not only work the Tenth Step throughout the day, but precede their  
3003 evening prayers with a brief summary of their thinking and behavior during that day.  
3004 We search in particular for self-justifying and self-willed behavior, and for traces of the  
3005 old Game in daily activities. We also at this time try to give ourselves credit for the  
3006 many things we have done right. We can then go to sleep with a good conscience, one  
3007 of the most priceless gifts of the program.

3008 We have already indicated that for us recovering addicts, a spiritual basis for living has  
3009 to be a main goal. The Third and Eleventh Steps are our primary tools for becoming  
3010 spiritual people. It is a good policy to set aside a specific time in the day to meditate, to  
3011 think about who we are, where we want to go, and to remind ourselves of the sources  
3012 of our help. The daily activities of our new lives are compelling. It is altogether too easy  
3013 for us addicts, who are compulsive by nature, to get caught up in a daily routine in  
3014 which we forget our primary purpose. We may find ourselves going day after day with  
3015 no systematic attempt at meditation or prayer, reassuring ourselves that we will pray  
3016 tomorrow. We should take the Eleventh Step on a daily basis. Like everything else of  
3017 value in life, it requires self-discipline. As we have indicated, setting aside a particular  
3018 time for taking the Eleventh Step is helpful. Many program members prefer either early  
3019 morning or late evening. Above all, it is necessary to be alone without distractions.  
3020 Reading spiritually oriented literature may be helpful. Each person in the program has  
3021 favorite books on spiritual growth. Ask around.

3022 In the Twelfth Step we learn to reach out to others. After we have experienced some  
3023 spiritual growth through applying the other steps in the program, we are ready to help  
3024 others. For most of us, the act of helping others is very unfamiliar. But the reason for  
3025 doing it is very simple. In helping them, we help ourselves. The still suffering addict  
3026 reminds us of who we once were, and gives us an insight into our addiction that we  
3027 cannot obtain any other way. Doing Twelfth Step work puts us face to face with our  
3028 recovery. We see how far we have come.

3029 What is called a Twelfth Step call is a contact made with a still using or barely clean  
3030 addict outside the Narcotics Anonymous meeting rooms. It may take place anywhere,  
3031 in an addict's home, rehab, jail, detox center, or anywhere. The call may have been  
3032 initiated through a personal referral or a call to the Narcotics Anonymous hotline.

3033 Always go on a 12 step call with two or more recovering addicts. Six months or so of  
3034 clean time is suggested for you to begin helping others. There are other rules you  
3035 should remember. Men Twelfth Step men; Women Twelfth Step women. You should  
3036 not Twelfth Step members of your own family or fellow Game players. Let someone

3037 else in the program do this. As much as you may want to, you cannot help such people.  
3038 It is impossible for them to see you as a source of help. To them you are still a fellow  
3039 player of the Game.

3040 Doing Twelfth Step work is essential to our growth, but it requires caution. Not only  
3041 our own welfare but the welfare of others is involved. You must discipline yourself to  
3042 accept the experience of those who have been in the program longer than you and to  
3043 defer to their judgment. At this particular point in your recovery the most important  
3044 asset you can take on a Twelfth Step call is the example of your own recovery. Don't  
3045 try to lay on the still suffering addict a wisdom you can't possibly have. We share our  
3046 "experience, strength and hope." It is best to think of yourself merely as a messenger,  
3047 carrying the message from one place to another. Whether the message is accepted or  
3048 not is not up to you. It is up to God. Its acceptance requires the other person's  
3049 readiness. You can't sell anyone on recovery. As someone once said, "If they aren't  
3050 ready, you can't say anything right. And if they are ready, you can't say anything  
3051 wrong." The result is out of your hands. It is the effort which helps you.

3052 This has been a brief summary of the Steps. The newcomer who wishes to broaden  
3053 and deepen their knowledge of the Steps should make Step meetings a regular part of  
3054 their meeting schedule. The systematic application of the Steps to our daily lives will  
3055 help keep us in fit mental and spiritual condition. As long as we are spiritually and  
3056 mentally fit, we will not use. Remember, the goal of working the steps is to learn the  
3057 spiritual principles of the steps and incorporate them into our lives. First we work the  
3058 steps; then we live the steps.

## 3059 **Exploring the Traditions**

3060 We come to this program from homes and apartments, offices and schools, treatment  
3061 centers and jails, multimillion dollar yachts and gutters. We come from many different  
3062 places, but they all share loneliness, pain, and fear. Somehow addiction draws us  
3063 together in Narcotics Anonymous.

3064 We came to this program for many different reasons. Those of us who stay, do so for  
3065 the same reasons; to stop using and stay clean. After we've actually stopped, and the  
3066 fog has cleared a bit, most of us take a look around to see what this program is all  
3067 about. We start trying to do the things we see those around us doing. Eventually we  
3068 come to the Twelve Steps and try to work them the best we can. The result is a degree  
3069 of freedom that we never have known before. We find freedom from drugs and the  
3070 obsession to use them; and in time a bit of freedom from that part of ourselves that  
3071 has been destroyed.

3072 We're taught that we can only keep what we have by giving it away. So we seek out and  
3073 give our hand to other addicts who have problems like ours and want help. Usually one  
3074 of the first things we try to do when we're working with a newcomer is to get them to a  
3075 meeting. After all, that's what worked for us.

3076 Why is this so? What is it about our meetings that are so special? Usually, about all we  
3077 can say is that there is a feeling there, a feeling of strength and hope and love; an  
3078 atmosphere of recovery. Our meetings are very special to most of us. They're a place  
3079 where we feel safe; a place where we fit in. But what keeps it that way? One would  
3080 think that any time people like us get together the results would be chaos. Groups of  
3081 self-centered, self-willed, isolated individuals just can't meet together peacefully and  
3082 safely; but we do. The reason that we can is that we have Twelve Traditions that help  
3083 to keep our groups safe and free.

3084 Because we hear about *suggested steps* and of *no musts* so often, some of us make a  
3085 mistake and assume that this applies to our groups the way it applies to the individual.  
3086 The Twelve Traditions of NA are not suggested, and they are not negotiable. These are  
3087 the rules that keep our fellowship alive and free.

3088 The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous teach us how to get along with our  
3089 fellow addicts. When we carry these principles outside of the rooms of NA into  
3090 everyday living, we learn how to get along with family, friends, acquaintances, romantic  
3091 relationships, work relationships, other people, society, and the entire human race. We  
3092 use the Twelve Traditions to guide our Home Groups. They are truly the ties that bind

3093 us together, and if followed, stop us from tearing each other apart, and save us from  
3094 ourselves. The 12 Traditions of NA are built upon spiritual principles and spiritual  
3095 principles are never in conflict. The Traditions take precedence over the all other  
3096 processes or policies used to help guide our groups and service structure. The program  
3097 of Narcotics Anonymous is the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions. One of our old-timers  
3098 often says, “If you are only working the 12 Steps and not the 12 Traditions, you are  
3099 only working half the NA program.”

3100 The Traditions are truly the binds that tie us together, but they do not work  
3101 automatically. It is only through understanding and application that they have power.

*1) Our common welfare should come first;  
personal recovery depends on NA unity.*

It makes sense that our First Tradition concerns unity and our common welfare. One of the most important parts of our new way of life is being a part of a group of addicts also seeking recovery. Our survival is directly related to the survival of our groups and of our fellowship.

3107 Before coming to NA, most of us tried to clean up or stay clean on our own. Many  
3108 of us sought treatment or professional help. These efforts were unsuccessful for  
3109 us; it wasn't until we came to Narcotics Anonymous that recovery seemed possible.  
3110 This program can do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We came and saw  
3111 this program work in the lives of other addicts. Their recovery gave us hope for  
3112 ourselves.

3113 Our common welfare is that “we all suffer from the disease of addiction, and that  
3114 we want to get better.” We all want to recover from the disease of addiction. That  
3115 is what we have in common. Other than that, we may have nothing in common.  
3116 Having nothing else in common is fine, because in our meetings we focus on  
3117 recovery, helping each other, and helping the still suffering addict. Everything else  
3118 is really just an outside issue and of no importance in our meetings. Unless an  
3119 addict is suffering from something and that “something” is affecting their recovery.  
3120 Then, focusing on the feelings, we can relate and if we have experience with in  
3121 dealing with the situation or feeling, we offer our experience and hope.

3122 My personal recovery depends on me getting along with you. We can disagree, but  
3123 when we do, we need to disagree without being disagreeable. That is, we focus on  
3124 the issue, topic, or idea without focusing on the person. Because when the  
3125 discussion is over, we realize that we need each other for Recovery, and if  
3126 appropriate, we Hug. We depend on each other. Our common welfare and unity  
3127 in recover is more important that our differences.

3128 We are unified in Recovery. This does not mean we are uniformity. Each member  
3129 may be extremely different in all aspects of life, except we have Recovery from the  
3130 disease of addiction in common which brings us together.

*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.*

3136

In NA we have a great concern in protecting ourselves from ourselves. Our Second Tradition is another example of this. By nature we seem to be strong-willed, self-centered people, seeking self-gratification in the realms of money, power, and sex. An important part of our recovery is learning how to live with these drives; how to realign our  
3137 misguided instincts, how to stop acting out our insanities, how to disarm our self -  
3138 destructive mechanisms, and how to re-channel our energies toward constructive ends.  
3139 In other words, we have to replace our "dying program" with a "living program". Early  
3140 in our recovery we learned that we did a pretty poor job with our lives. One of our  
3141 sayings is "Our best ideas got us here". This seems apt, as we look back and see how  
3142 many times our schemes and plans got us into trouble despite their original intent. We  
3143 were powerless over our addictions and could not manage our own lives. Now we find  
3144 ourselves thrust together in NA, mismanagers all, not one of us capable of making  
3145 consistently good decisions. When we realized this had related to our new group  
3146 oriented way of life we often experienced a sort of gut-level panicky feeling.

3147 At this point our old timers usually come forward to reassure us. "Don't worry. God  
3148 takes care of fools and addicts. This is a spiritual program and God won't let us screw it  
3149 up" they say. Our old-timers go on to explain that in NA we rely on a loving God as  
3150 He expresses Himself in our Group conscience rather than on personal opinion or

3151 ego. In working the Steps we need to come to depend on a Power greater than  
3152 ourselves. We continue this relationship and utilize it for our Group purposes. If we  
3153 each turned our will and our lives over to God's care and seek to do God's will, He will  
3154 express Himself on a group level. When a decision needs to be made for a group, each  
3155 of the members should take the time to meditate on what is most beneficial to our  
3156 common welfare. If we do this, then the results will truly be an expression of the  
3157 spiritual concept of our Group.

3158 There is one truth which helps guide us. True spiritual principles are never in conflict;  
3159 they always complement each other. The true spiritual conscience of a group will never  
3160 contradict any of our other spiritual principles. Whenever we are faced with a group  
3161 decision, we first try to eliminate personalities, prejudices, and self-centeredness. Then  
3162 we review our decisions to make sure they are not in violation of any of our Twelve  
3163 Traditions. If they are, we take another look at our decision and try to resolve it. This  
3164 approach isn't foolproof, but it has helped to prevent problems many times.

3165 We try to rest authority in the spiritual conscience of the group. In keeping with this,  
3166 we make a special point of trying to prevent authoritarian leadership. We have learned  
3167 that for our Fellowship leadership by example and by selfless service works, and that  
3168 direction and manipulation fails. Our experience shows that if a group becomes an  
3169 extension of the personality of a leader or a certain member, then it loses its  
3170 effectiveness. Newcomers don't stay, and members stop coming. The group must then  
3171 change or die. This is sometimes a difficult and agonizing process. Those who stay  
3172 grow through the experience; but what happens to those who leave? An atmosphere of  
3173 recovery in our groups is one of our most precious assets; and we must guard it  
3174 carefully lest we lose it to politics and personalities.

3175 The word God represents a Higher Power. Some of us struggle deeply with the word  
3176 "God" itself. Often based on horrible experiences we have had in our lives, as  
3177 impressionable children and adults. In Narcotics Anonymous, God is used to represent  
3178 a Higher Power and is not meant to be a direct correlation to other religions or outside  
3179 entities using the same word "God". Please try and allow yourself to accept the God in

3180 Narcotics Anonymous as the God of your understanding, your Higher Power. We  
3181 hope you're able to allow yourself the freedom to remove any past stigmatism and trust  
3182 in the process. You are truly free to choose the God of your understanding; regardless  
3183 of what the rest of the outside world is saying and doing.

3184 In our Steps, God is mentioned five times directly and two times indirectly. God is  
3185 mentioned seven times in our Steps. Steps three, five, six, seven, and eleven reference  
3186 God directly; and Steps two and twelve indirectly. To be working the program of  
3187 Narcotics Anonymous, we need to have a God in our lives. There are no conditions  
3188 put on a member as to what type of God or who their individual God is. This is totally  
3189 up to the individual. The choice is ours. Some of us have used the acronym GOD to  
3190 mean; Good Orderly Direction, Group Of Druggies, or something else, especially if  
3191 your language is not English. Your God may be whatever you choose. Just choose one.  
3192 In recovery, we need to have a God.

3193 A Group majority is not a Group Conscience. One way to know that difference is by  
3194 examining the components of the discussion. Group Conscience is based on Spiritual  
3195 Principles and true Spiritual Principles are never in conflict. Some Groups also  
3196 establish a baseline to help. For example, some Groups may say 80% approval is  
3197 required or 100%. It is totally up to the Group. Remember though, with only a  
3198 majority in which 51% wins, then there are 49% who lose. By simply achieving a  
3199 criteria for approval does not necessarily mean a Group conscience was reached. We  
3200 must each examine our own hearts and ensure we communicated our Gods guidance,  
3201 and not that of a powerful personality or agenda. Calmly following our heart in the  
3202 quiet corners of our minds often guides us to Gods will for us.

3203 What Trusted Servants means is that they are trusted to carry the Group Conscience to  
3204 the next level of service. A Trusted Servant cannot change the vote being carried.  
3205 They do not govern. The word "govern" in English means that you can make a  
3206 decision for someone else. The trusted servant does not make a decision for the  
3207 Group. They carry the Group Conscience. If the area, region, zonal, world, or  
3208 committee changes the motion on the floor, that Trusted Servant has to abstain from



3209 voting since they have not given the Home Group a chance to vote on it. They are  
3210 trusted to carry the Group Conscience to the next level. They do not govern; they do  
3211 not make decisions for the Group. A Trusted Servant that changes the Group  
3212 Conscience is violating the 2nd Tradition.

3213 Group Conscience refers to a Loving God as expressed at the Home Group level.  
3214 The Home Group of NA is where Group Conscience occurs.

*3) The only requirement for membership  
is a desire to stop using.*

The only requirement for membership to Narcotics Anonymous is a desire to stop using. This is our only requirement, and rightfully so. Addiction does not discriminate, why should recovery? The third tradition does not say a person has to be drug free. They just have to have the desire to be drug free, to stop using. If a person is still using they can be a member of Narcotics Anonymous, this includes joining a Home Group, attending closed meetings, and attending NA. However, a person who is still using cannot serve the NA Fellowship because NA is a program of Complete and Total Abstinence from all mind-altering mood-changing drugs. Any service position in which there is a clean time requirement, even if the requirement is one day, a using addict cannot serve. Normally if someone ends up at an NA meeting, especially by their own choice, they have a desire to quit using. Any addict who has a desire to stop using can become a member of NA.

3228 Some members of NA view relapsers as members that do not have a desire. Our  
3229 experience shows this not to be true. Many people who relapsed, chronic or not,  
3230 that are clean now, have told us how hard it is to come back to a meeting; normally  
3231 due to feelings of overwhelming guilt, shame, and embarrassment. We must  
3232 remember that using is a normal state for an addict. We are all one drug away  
3233 from a relapse and must not judge. We don't have to accept the using behavior,  
3234 but we do have to accept the addict. Our job is to help create an atmosphere of  
3235 Recovery and to Love our fellow addicts, not necessary the behavior but the  
3236 person.

3237 We are Narcotics Anonymous and our problem is addiction, other fellowships deal  
3238 with other problems. Most newcomers are led to the fellowship which best suits  
3239 their needs. Individuals come with problems that express themselves in various  
3240 ways. They don't clearly fit into our fellowship. Many of these people become  
3241 valuable and active members of several fellowships while others single out the  
3242 fellowship with which they are the most comfortable. Our primary purpose is to  
3243 carry the message to the addict who still suffers; where they find recovery is not  
3244 our basic concern. We know of members with a history of drug abuse who have  
3245 found recovery in other fellowships. We support these members and rejoice in  
3246 their recovery. An addict who has found freedom and recovery anywhere is a  
3247 friend of ours. Although we would welcome them in our groups, we do not seek  
3248 them out or force them to join NA. This would not be in keeping with our  
3249 spiritual aims.

3250 Twelve step fellowships do not compete. We are mutually supportive and  
3251 cooperate for the common good. For us recovery is more important than  
3252 membership. Some newcomers seem to have trouble finding a fellowship or  
3253 fellowships in which they fit. We encourage them to shop around, to attend  
3254 various meetings and find out where they most fully identify.

3255 Membership in Narcotics Anonymous is not automatic when someone walks in  
3256 the door or when the newcomer decides to stop using. The decision to become a  
3257 member of our fellowship rests with the individual. Any addict who has a desire to  
3258 stop using can become a member of NA.

3259 The choice of membership rests with the individual. We feel the ideal state for our  
3260 fellowship exists when an addict can openly and freely come to an NA meeting;  
3261 wherever and whenever they choose and leave just as freely if they want to.

3262 We have learned that recovery is a reality, and life without drugs is better than we  
3263 ever imaged possible. Our doors are open to all addicts who have a desire to stop  
3264 using and want what we have to offer; joining us in our new way of life.

4) *Each Group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other Groups, or NA, as a whole.*

The autonomy of our groups is one of our most precious possessions. This sounds great but what does it mean? What is it to be autonomous? One dictionary defines autonomous as "undertaken or carried on without outside

3269 control", "existing or capable of existing independently", "responding, reacting or  
3270 developing independently of the whole". Autonomy is all these things to us and  
3271 more. Our groups are truly self-governing and are not subject to outside control.  
3272 Each group can exist on its own if it must. Each group has had to grow on its own  
3273 and stand on its own two feet. One might ask: Is this really true; are we truly  
3274 autonomous, what about our service committees, our offices, our activities, our  
3275 hotlines, our websites, and all the other things that go on in NA? The answer is  
3276 that these things are not NA. They are services that we can utilize to help us in our  
3277 recovery and to further the primary purpose of our groups.

3278 Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women, addicts, meeting  
3279 together in Groups, and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom  
3280 from addiction and a new way to live. Narcotics Anonymous is the recovery  
3281 meeting with members. All else is not NA. Those other things we mentioned are  
3282 the result of members caring enough to reach out and offer their help and  
3283 experience so that our road may be easier. Whether or not we choose to utilize  
3284 these services for the benefit of a Group is up to us, they are not thrust down our  
3285 throats.

3286 Thus autonomy means that our Groups are completely independent. A Home  
3287 Group may do whatever it wants to as long the Group does not violate the 12  
3288 Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. This frees our Home Groups up to having  
3289 different formats and ways of carrying the message; independently of each other.  
3290 This freedom and diversity of format also provides choices for addicts seeking  
3291 recovery of different meeting styles that may be a better fit for an addict. For  
3292 example, some addict may prefer a small candle light meeting, while another is  
3293 drawn to a huge speaker meeting. Each Group may operate with totally freedom to

3294 carry the message of recovery, as they wish too, provided they do not violate the 12  
3295 Traditions.

*5) Each Group has but one primary purpose - to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.*

3300 addict.

3301 What is our message? We hear this question answered many ways. In our groups  
3302 we share our experience, strength and hope and this is our message – “that an  
3303 addict, any addict, can stop using drugs; lose the desire to use; and find a new way  
3304 to live.” Our message is hope and the promise of freedom. When it's all said and  
3305 done, our primary group purpose can only be to carry this message to the addict  
3306 who still suffers because this is all we have to give.

3307 Since our primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery, we don't come to  
3308 an NA meeting for anything else. Narcotics Anonymous is not here to offer  
3309 financial advice, help with a job search, relationship counseling, sex therapy, lend  
3310 money, or anything else. We are here to learn how to recover from the disease of  
3311 addiction, and to share with others our experience, strength, and hope with each  
3312 other; not our advice or opinions.

*6) An NA Group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

3318

3319 speakers or literature from another fellowship. This does not mean if a person  
3320 makes a personal choice to go to other fellowships also, that they can't speak at an  
3321 NA meeting. A member is free to do whatever they choose to do outside of NA.  
3322 However, when they are at an NA meeting, speaking or sharing at our meeting,

Our Group has but one primary purpose – to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. This addict may have no clean time, one day clean, or decades clean. The Groups are responsible for carrying the message to that

Our Fifth Tradition defines our primary purpose and our Sixth Tradition tells us some of the things we must do to preserve and protect this spiritual aim. We never lend the NA name to any related facility. This includes club houses, services bodies, treatment centers, &/or any outside enterprise. This also means our Groups do not use

3323 that they share an NA message, from personal experience and NA literature, using  
3324 NA language when talking.

3325 A NA message is when we share our personal experience with the 12 Steps and 12  
3326 Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. NA language is referring to our experiences  
3327 with the disease of addiction and our recovery earned by applying the spiritual  
3328 principles outlined in the NA program. The NA program is a life of complete  
3329 abstinence from all mind-altering mood-changing drugs. Our program is a set of  
3330 spiritual principles found in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of NA that we live in  
3331 our daily life. We are living clean, one day at a time.

3332 The Sixth Tradition goes on to warn us what may happen if we do what we ought  
3333 never do: "...lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our  
3334 primary purpose." If you say this quickly it almost sounds like "money, power, and  
3335 sex;" our old enemies. If you say it real quickly, it might sound like "people, places,  
3336 and things;" our old resentments and fantasies. Even if you don't say it quickly,  
3337 they have much in common. Often becoming obsessions; shutting us off from our  
3338 spiritual aim. They are the sort of things we get involved with and run with until  
3339 we are consumed. For the individual, this type of abuse can be devastating, but for  
3340 the group, even the slightest touch can be disastrous. When we as a group waver  
3341 from our primary purpose, addicts die who might have found recovery.

3342 The Sixth Tradition has been one of those just sort of read and let it go at that. It's  
3343 hard to understand. But when we really take a look, when we really try to  
3344 understand, its simplicity amazes us. We can see the danger of endorsement,  
3345 financial support and letting others use our name; we can see how easily things can  
3346 lead to abuse of money, property and prestige; and we can foresee the results of  
3347 this abuse and the heartache it can bring.

*7) Every NA Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*

3351 and such. We in Narcotics Anonymous are fully capable of standing on

3352 our own two feet. We decline outside contributions, because if we don't  
3353 we pay a price, and that price is always too high. Nor will we charge for  
3354 our services for to do so would distract from our spiritual purpose.  
3355 Because for us the price is paid within our groups: disunity, controversy,  
3356 insanity and death. We will not put our freedom on the line again; not for  
3357 "an easier, softer way", not for anything; never again!

3358 For example, say a local priest likes what we are doing in the community  
3359 and offers us a room at the church to use for our meetings, free of charge.  
3360 If we accept their offer, we don't own the space for our meeting, therefore  
3361 the priest can come into the meeting and start sharing from their book.  
3362 But if we paid rent for the meeting, then we own that room for the hour  
3363 and no one may come in and interrupt our meeting. It is our space and  
3364 our meeting.

3365 Our poverty enables us to be much closer to our Fellowship. We all have  
3366 to pull together, and in pulling together we learn that we really are a part of  
3367 something greater than ourselves.

3368 The 7th tradition is not just about money. It says self-supporting. We  
3369 have talents; we support ourselves with our own talents, and creativity –  
3370 like writing and editing our own literature, designing our own artwork, and  
3371 creating our own websites. NA is full of diverse talented recovering people  
3372 who talents are capable of fulfilling all the requirements to create and carry  
3373 our message.

8) *Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*

Some have described NA as a fellowship made up of the failures from other programs. To a great extent this is true; many of our members have unsuccessfully sought recovery in many other programs, in many other ways. "Jail did not help us at all. Medicine, religion and psychiatry seemed to have no answers for us that we could use." Drug replacement therapies kept us out of jail, but numb to the best life has to offer. We ourselves have said, "Give us the ones you can't do

3381 anything with; give us your hardest cases. We'll welcome them with open arms."  
3382 Somehow NA works when other programs and methods have failed. What is it  
3383 about us that makes this so? We don't have any secret or special methods. We  
3384 don't have any cure-all remedies. We don't really have many of the things that  
3385 others offer addicts. What is it about NA that makes us the most widespread and  
3386 successful program for addicts in the world? Perhaps it's something simple.  
3387 Perhaps it's because we don't have these things, that it is possible for us to succeed  
3388 where others have failed. What do we have? We have our steps; we have mobility;  
3389 we understand and care; we have lived active addiction and experienced recovery,  
3390 and we are motivated; we have each other.

3391 The basis of our program is the Twelve Steps. We got these Steps from Alcoholics  
3392 Anonymous, who thought enough of them to give them freely. AA got the Steps  
3393 from various sources. The Steps are based on spiritual principles that have been  
3394 known and followed for centuries. Most religious or spiritual orders utilize these  
3395 same principles in some way. These principles are certainly not unique to us, but  
3396 they are spiritual principles and that makes them special. Spiritual principles are  
3397 basic truths that do not change with time or place; they simply work in all cases.

3398 This program has been called a "hip pocket program". We don't require any  
3399 equipment or special facilities. It doesn't take special training to make this program  
3400 work. We carry this program with us wherever we go. In our hearts, actions, and  
3401 the Little White Book fits in our pocket. We carry our message to the addict  
3402 wherever they are and whenever they're ready. This program fits every addict  
3403 because the addict learns to apply our Steps to their life in their own way. Our  
3404 ability to reach addicts anytime, anywhere has certainly been a great advantage for  
3405 us.

3406 Perhaps our greatest asset is empathy, our ability to understand and identify with  
3407 the newcomer. We know what it's really like to kick the habit; we've been there. We  
3408 know what it's like to face life without drugs, each of us has had to do this. We  
3409 know the prices of addiction; we've all had to pay them. We can't look down on

3410 the addict who comes to us; we've all been newcomers. We can't con each other;  
3411 we've played all the games. We understand the addict and addiction perhaps better  
3412 than anyone else can, after all, this is the life we lived. We care for and love the  
3413 addict as if they are ourselves, because the addict really is our self.

3414 Our motivation is simple; this program was given freely to us by addicts who  
3415 cared. We only do the same. We have learned that "we can only keep what we have  
3416 by giving it away". We know that recovery is a matter of life and death for the  
3417 newcomer and for ourselves.

3418 These are the things we are and how our program works. They are a reality for us.  
3419 We have our Steps; we have mobility; we really understand and care; and we are  
3420 motivated by survival. All these things are a contradiction to traditional recovery  
3421 approaches and to professionalism. The professional has no place in our  
3422 Fellowship; our very nature prohibits this. Professionalism as such is not the  
3423 problem. We recognize and admire the professional and their sphere. Many of our  
3424 members in their endeavors outside of the Fellowship have become professionals  
3425 in their own right. It's just that there's no place for professionalism in NA; for our  
3426 purpose we have learned the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is  
3427 truly without parallel.

3428 Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. We do  
3429 the best we can and sometimes we need a little help. Volunteer work is the  
3430 backbone of our service, but volunteers work only to the best of their abilities, only  
3431 at their convenience. Some of our services require skills, abilities or a scheduled  
3432 time commitment we are unable to supply as volunteers. Most of us do not have  
3433 the training necessary or the extra time required to fulfill these functions. Our  
3434 Eighth Tradition also recognizes this and tells us that we may employ special  
3435 workers in our service centers. Without their help, we might be unable to respond  
3436 to many of those who reach out to us for help.

3437 Each of us in a Narcotics Anonymous meeting may be a professional in our  
3438 personal life, but when walk into the rooms of NA we are just an addict. We are



3439 James and Mary Addict. We all have the same last name, Addict, and we are all  
3440 equal. We have no professionals inside the rooms of an NA meeting. If we open  
3441 an office, we can hire a special worker. The special worker is there only to do a  
3442 job. They have no status or authority in NA. The traditions are written for the  
3443 Groups of NA. We are all equal and equality is why relationships grow.

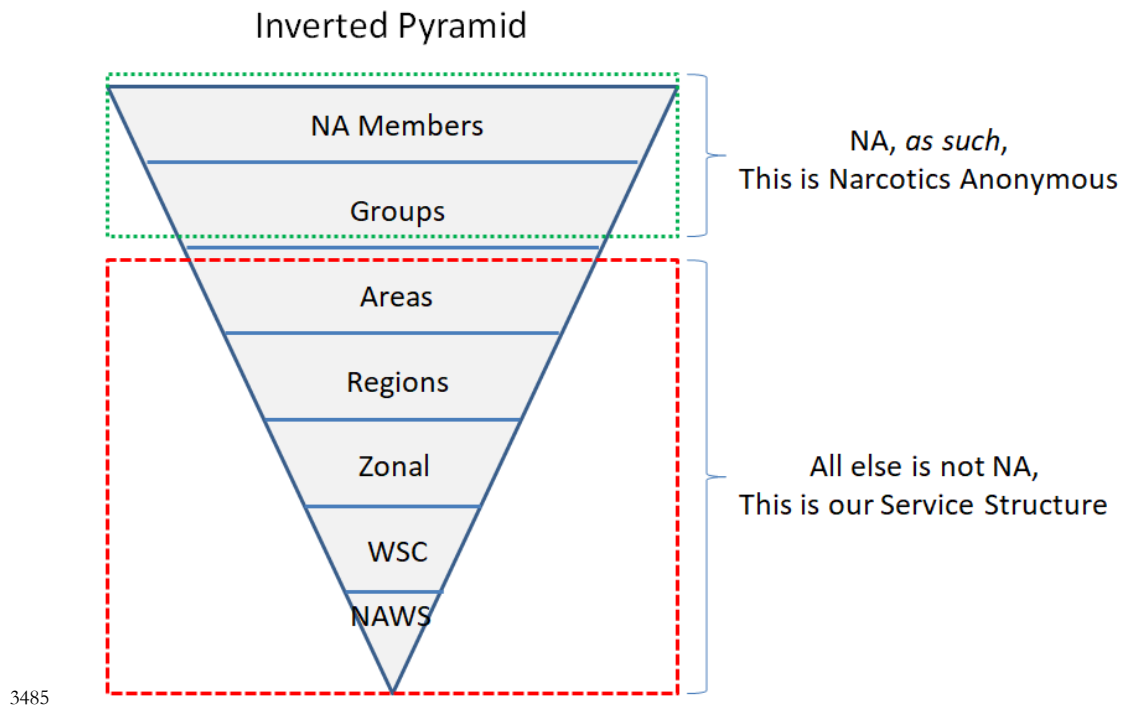
9) *NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*

NA, as such, is the Recovery Meeting. This is also known as a Group or Home Group having a meeting. Our members are addicts who have the desire to stop using, who want what we have to offer, and who have chosen to join us. Our meetings are a gathering of members for the purpose of staying clean. Our principles are the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions. This is NA as such, members participating in Groups, learning and living our principles. All else is not NA.

3452 Another point of confusion is the term organized, which has several meanings. Our  
3453 Steps and Traditions are uniform and set in a specific order. They are numbered; they  
3454 are not random and unstructured. Certainly they are organized, but this is not the  
3455 organization of our Ninth Tradition. For the purpose of this Tradition, organized  
3456 means having an administrative structure and this implies management and control.  
3457 On this basis, the meaning of Tradition Nine is clear. NA should never be run by  
3458 bureaucracy or management, nor controlled by individuals within an administrative  
3459 structure. If we were to allow this, NA would surely lose the best it has to offer and  
3460 choke to death on our insanities. Even without this Tradition, organization such as this  
3461 would be in opposition to our spiritual principles. A loving God as He may express  
3462 Himself in our Group Conscience would find no place within an administrative  
3463 structure. How could a trusted servant manage and control? Service and management  
3464 are contradictory. Government implies control, but our leaders do not govern. How  
3465 could autonomy exist in an administrative structure? Specialization and professionalism  
3466 are the basis of any management scheme. Any administrative structure, by its very  
3467 nature, eliminated the possibility of autonomy. An organized NA is a contradiction in  
3468 terms and any attempt to force organization on us would destroy us.

3469 The Ninth Tradition goes on to define the nature of the things that we can do, outside  
3470 NA, to help NA. It says that we may create service boards or committees directly  
3471 responsible to those they serve. This is the basis of our service structure, but keep in  
3472 mind that although these entities are created to serve our Fellowship they are not a part  
3473 of Narcotics Anonymous. None of them has the power to rule, censor, decide, or  
3474 dictate. They exist solely to serve the Groups. Our service structure consists of our  
3475 Groups and their business sense: our area service committees, regional service  
3476 committees, zonal service committees, World Service Conference, World Service  
3477 Board of Trustees, and World Service Office (NAWS). Each of these is directly  
3478 responsible through the service structure, to the members of NA and to a loving God  
3479 as He may express Himself in our Group Conscience.

3480 Each of the committees is directly responsible to the individual member, to the person,  
3481 who is at the top of the inverted pyramid, as a member of a Group. Each level must  
3482 carry the Group Conscience as said, and may not change what the Home Group  
3483 conscience was as the Group Conscience is carry down to the next level. The  
3484 representative at any level cannot change the vote they are Trusted to carry.



3486 Under the Inverted Pyramid each level of the service structure is accountable to the  
3487 NA Group and Member. This model allows for the Groups of Narcotics Anonymous  
3488 to guide the Fellowship. Each decision the fellowship makes is to originate and remain  
3489 with the NA Groups in which the service structure is responsible too. Those they serve  
3490 are the Groups of NA and the Groups of NA are directed by a Loving God as He may  
3491 express Himself in our Group Conscience.

3492 Following the Ninth Tradition, each NA Group (Home Group) has one vote. In the  
3493 past, group votes would roll up into area votes, regional votes, possibly zonal votes,  
3494 and even including World Board Member votes where one person's vote could  
3495 outweigh hundreds of thousands of addicts voting from a large region. All counted up  
3496 at the World Service Conference. This is no longer required as technology now exists  
3497 where each NA group gets one vote. Period. NA members vote in their Home  
3498 Group, and the Home Group votes are counted up on NA service voting matters,  
3499 thereby ensuring that each NA member has an equal say; one member, one vote – with  
3500 all members being equal. Anything else is a violation of the Twelve Traditions.

*10) Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*

The 10th Tradition keeps NA focused on itself, stopping us from getting distracted or associated with a person or organization which may damage our reputation. We, at NA, may go to a local organization and inform them about us; such as where our meetings are, what an H&I meeting

3506 is, and so on. But we do not associate ourselves with an outside organization. This  
3507 includes the Drug Court, Parole & Probation Officers, Treatment Centers, the World  
3508 Health Organization, Government agencies, or any outside entity. To do so would  
3509 distract NA from itself.

3510 For example, NA is not going to associate itself with a politician's cause that wants to  
3511 have a war on drugs. That is an outside issue. We as members may have personal  
3512 beliefs. And if we choose, we may work with the politicians as a member of society,  
3513 but not as a member of NA. We can support the politician, or anyone else in society as

3514 a member of society, or just as ourselves. However, we cannot support any outside  
3515 issue as a member representing Narcotics Anonymous.

3516 We do not have an opinion on Drug Replacement Therapy or Medical Assisted  
3517 Treatment. What people choose to do outside of an NA meeting is their own business.  
3518 That is an outside issue. But if a person walks into the rooms of NA, and is on mind-  
3519 altering mood-changing drugs, prescribed or not, then it becomes an inside issue. And  
3520 we do have something to say about that. What a person does, or is on, at an NA  
3521 meeting becomes an inside issue. We are a program of complete abstinence.

3522 As far as outside of the NA meeting, we have no opinion on what your doctor  
3523 prescribes you. We have no opinion on what your drug counselor or therapist tells you.  
3524 That is between you and them. But when you walk into the rooms of a Narcotics  
3525 Anonymous meeting it becomes an inside issue. We have an issue because our  
3526 program is a program of Total Abstinences from all mind-altering, mood-changing  
3527 drugs. So when you walk in the rooms of NA, it becomes an inside issue. Our  
3528 Traditions teach us that you only need a desire to stop using to join our Fellowship.  
3529 However, if you are not Clean per the NA definition (Total Abstinences from all mind-  
3530 altering, mood-changing drugs), then you cannot serve the Fellowship. You are  
3531 welcome, can join a Home Group; you just cannot serve where a Clean Time  
3532 requirement exists until you get Clean. But you are welcome at all of our meetings.

3533 We have heard members on a prescribed mind-altering mood-controlling drug say,  
3534 “well that’s an outside issue, and I can use it if I want to.” Yes, you certainly can use if  
3535 you want to. That is your choice, but you can’t come in and serve the Fellowship cause  
3536 then it becomes an inside issue – and we do have something to say on that.

*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.*

This Tradition also deals with our relationship to those outside the Fellowship. It tells us how we should relate to the addict who still suffers, and it tells us how to conduct our effort at the public level. This has meaning for dealing with both potential members and the general public. We

3542 have learned the value of teaching by example rather than direction. This has worked

3543 for us and we utilize this principle when we work with other addicts. Our message is  
3544 most obvious in our lives. In this sense we are the message. When working with a  
3545 newcomer, we try to tell them where we came from and what has happened to us. If  
3546 they can identify with us and if they want what we have to offer them, they may join us.  
3547 This is attraction. We never promise anything other than a chance to stop using if they  
3548 want to. This is all we really have to offer and to make any other promise would be to  
3549 distract from our primary purpose.

3550 We should never misrepresent what we offer even if by doing so we might be able to  
3551 get a few more addicts to attend our meetings. It is easy to make promises. We could  
3552 tell an addict that we offer all kinds of things other than recovery. Addicts would flock  
3553 to our doors; they would come for a free meal, or housing, or money, or a job, or a  
3554 lover, or any kind of free ride. But how many would have a desire to stop using, and  
3555 how many would leave as soon as they found out we couldn't keep our promise? How  
3556 many would never come back? How many would die without ever having a chance to  
3557 find recovery? Promotion is representing ourselves as something we are not; in order  
3558 to accomplish something we want. We don't use promotion to encourage addicts to  
3559 come to us and we don't use promotions to make ourselves more acceptable. Our  
3560 successes speak for themselves.

3561 Narcotics Anonymous services has a Public Information Committee to help get  
3562 information about NA to the public. We, as NA members, never go into the public  
3563 and say, "I'm Mary Addict and I have so many years clean, and ...". If a member did  
3564 this, and then was found high the following week. What would that say about the NA  
3565 Fellowship? It would say loudly that NA does not work. The 11th Tradition also  
3566 protects our Groups and Fellowship from ourselves.

3567 When we create Public Information signs to be hung up or rent a bill board and such.  
3568 We always say "... maybe we can help..." NA never says "we can help", or "we can  
3569 cure you." We will never say we can do anything for a person because NA can never  
3570 guarantee that any addict will stop using. We say that maybe we can help or it worked  
3571 for us. When we do Public Relations work we do it with anonymity.

3572 Personal anonymity is really much more. It is a point of freedom, and personal  
3573 recovery. No member of N.A should ever place themselves in a position where they  
3574 have to make a statement for NA as a whole. No one member is NA and no one  
3575 member can speak for us. We have no elite class nor special members. Each of us has  
3576 our own story, and our own recovery. Individually, we are powerless, but as a  
3577 fellowship guided by a loving Higher Power, we can achieve great things.

*12) Anonymity is the spiritual foundation  
of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to  
place principles before personalities.*

The 12th Tradition sums up all of the Traditions. Anonymity starts with the 1st Tradition where our common welfare comes first. This principle is very simple. When we come into the rooms of NA, we are all addicts.

3582 We are all equal. A person trying to get clean, a chronic relapser, and a person with fifty  
3583 years clean – we are all equal. It doesn't matter who you are outside of the Groups of  
3584 NA; a doctor, lawyer, landscaper, seamstress, regional delegate - we are all equal –  
3585 black, white, yellow, brown, it doesn't matter – gay, straight, bi, trans, or asexual; it  
3586 doesn't matter - we are all addicts seeking recovery from the disease of addiction.

3587 We must not separate people in our meetings. For example, if a guy pulls up to a  
3588 meeting in a Rolls Royce, he's not a rich addict. Cause if we consider him a rich addict,  
3589 he's not going to be able to recovery; because we made him different from us. Or if a  
3590 good looking woman walks into the rooms of NA, and she's pretty and built like a  
3591 movie star. And many addicts in the room say, "Man, I need to hook up with her  
3592 before she gets too healthy." We are not allowing her to have her anonymity to come  
3593 in and be just an addict seeking recovery.

3594 Some of our members believe one way to work this Tradition is to put the principle  
3595 before the personality when introducing ourselves. "I'm an addict, called ..." Stating  
3596 that this reminds them that they are an addict first, then the person. The principle is  
3597 that I am an addict, the personality is that I am ... This reminds us that we are an  
3598 addict first.

3599 Where ever and whenever we go to a meeting, we are equal to everyone there. Our last  
3600 name is Addict, every one of us. We are all related - brothers and sisters in recovery.

3601 The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous are even more inter-related than our  
3602 Steps. They complement each other and are bound together by the principle of  
3603 anonymity. We've heard "Principles before personalities" so often it has become a  
3604 cliché like "Take it Easy" or "First Things First". But what does it mean? What is the  
3605 principle of anonymity?

3606 Anonymity is the whole basis of the program; it is truly the foundation. In order to  
3607 survive, we must set aside the differences we live by and become part of a greater  
3608 whole. The awakening of anonymity in each of us occurs when we finally give up  
3609 trying to manage our lives and begin to depend on a power greater than ourselves.

3610 Let us examine anonymity. It is the spiritual foundation of our Traditions. The First  
3611 Tradition talks about common welfare and NA unity. The placing of common welfare  
3612 before personal welfare in the group setting is a direct application of anonymity. The "I  
3613 wants, I wills and I should of" are replaced by "we" oriented thinking for the common  
3614 good; the result is unity. Unity is the direct result of the application of the principle of  
3615 anonymity within the group and the fellowship.

3616 The Second Tradition talks about having but one ultimate authority. No single person  
3617 (no personality) has authority. This is vested in a loving God to whom we have turned  
3618 over our will and lives. The anonymity of the servant should be typical of our service  
3619 positions. They themselves are not important; it is only the service which counts.

3620 The Third Tradition is a statement of anonymity. We do not define our members. We  
3621 only insist that they have a desire to stop using. Nothing else should matter. This desire  
3622 is the one crucial must of our program. We must either come with it or develop it  
3623 before the program will work for us.

3624 Individuality makes possible the autonomy of our Fourth Tradition. Without the  
3625 principle of anonymity, each group would set itself up as something different from the  
3626 rest; something special. Our groups would begin competing with each other for  
3627 members and for recognition. The resulting loss of unity would eventually destroy NA.

3628 Our Fifth Tradition says that each group has but one primary purpose. This unity of  
3629 purpose is the tie that binds our groups together. Our groups are not truly different;  
3630 each has the same spiritual aim and orientation; to carry the message to the addict who  
3631 still suffers. This purpose, and the anonymity of the groups, make it possible for an  
3632 addict to depend on us for help.

3633 Tradition Six tells us that we ought never finance, endorse or lend the NA name to any  
3634 facility or outside enterprise. To violate this rule would be to lose our independence.  
3635 With anonymity gone, personalities would take over and problems of money, property  
3636 and prestige would surely divert us from our primary purpose.

3637 Our Seventh Tradition guarantees each member the right and privilege to share in the  
3638 support of Narcotics Anonymous. Each of us is given the equal opportunity to help  
3639 anonymously. We uniformly reject outside contributions regardless of their source. We  
3640 also do not allow a member to contribute more than their fair share; to do so would be  
3641 to encourage the loss of their anonymity.

3642 In regards to our Eighth Tradition, we do not single out our members as  
3643 "professionals"; we try to maintain their chance to experience personal recovery and  
3644 grow. Not forcing power and status on our members is yet another form of anonymity.

3645 The service board and committees of our Ninth Tradition are directly responsible to a  
3646 loving God as expressed in a Group Conscience. They are not responsible to any  
3647 particular personality or set of personalities.

3648 In our Tenth Tradition, we strive to limit the growth of powerful personalities and  
3649 safeguard anonymity by having no opinion on outside issues. When controversy exists,  
3650 people take sides, personalities, come forward, and as this happens anonymity fades.  
3651 Here again we find consistency of action, and in its own way this is also anonymity.

3652 In our Eleventh Tradition, we find that the way we relate to the outside world is in fact  
3653 using personal anonymity. None of us are singled out, no one of us represents NA; to  
3654 do so would be to place our personalities ahead of others and this would be a violation



3655 of our independence. In attraction rather than promotion, we give the addict the right  
3656 to join in our anonymity and find recovery.

3657 Anonymity is everywhere in our Traditions and in our Fellowship. It is one of the  
3658 basics of recovery. The principle of anonymity protects us from our defects of  
3659 personality and character. Where anonymity exists, personalities and differences have  
3660 no power. Anonymity in action makes it impossible for principles to come before  
3661 personalities. We are all equal, we are all one, we are all just-another-addict.

3662

3663 Narcotics Anonymous – NA – Never Alone, Never Again.