

HANDOUT #1

HOW TO GET AND USE A SPONSOR

Over the years, my Sponsors have helped me work the Twelve Steps, study the Twelve Traditions and Concepts, urged me to try service as a foundation to my recovery, hugged me, and let me hug them back. In response to my gratitude for sharing their experience, strength, and hope with me, they would say, "I get just as much out of this as you do."

Now that I have sponsored members, I recognize the spiritual equality and balance of our mutual aid: when we give, we receive, and receiving completes the circle of giving. "Together We Can Make It!"

I am thinking of getting a Sponsor.

"Sponsorship is one of the chief resources we use to help us to cope with and recover from the effects of alcoholism. A sponsor is someone with whom we can share about ourselves and our circumstances in detail. Most of us choose a sponsor who has been involved with Al-Anon for some time, someone who is familiar enough with the program to help us learn to apply it to our own lives. Although most of Al-Anon's principles and techniques involve simple, easy-to-grasp ideas, slogans, or actions, knowing when and how to put them to work in our lives can be very confusing, and a sponsor can be a great help."

—*How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics (B-32)*, p. 36

I am not sure what a Sponsor is.

"Between Al-Anon meetings, we can call our sponsor when we face a difficult situation, achieve a goal, feel confused, or just want to talk.... A sponsor is a friend, a confidant who has experienced alcoholism's devastating effects and yet has learned through Al-Anon to find serenity and hope. He or she listens, shares experience, strength, and hope, and offers support and encouragement."

—*How Al-Anon Works*, p. 36

I'm not sure how to use a Sponsor.

"Sponsorship *is* a tool—a tool to pick up and use. Sponsorship can only help if I ask a sponsor to help me build an Al-Anon-based-life.... My sponsor was the first person I picked up based on a healthy motive. I liked her enthusiastic faith and admired her commitment to unconditional love. I wanted to know how she used the program to get where she was in her life.

"How did I use sponsorship? I phoned my sponsor to talk. I took little steps by sharing minor details about myself. Once I knew we both desired and were willing to maintain a high degree of privacy, I felt comfortable to confide more intimate thoughts and feelings.

When our relationship began to glide on the wings of trust, I asked if we could meet regularly twice a month for several hours at a time, I wanted her support and insight while I explored more deeply this person whom I didn't even really know—me.

“Gradually and together we built roots and a pair of wings so I could soar and feel connected at the same time. I borrowed her faith until I acquired my own. I leaned on her Higher Power until I began to connect with mine. It all happened because I took the risk to love myself enough to ask for help.

“Do I love myself enough to use the tools of the program that have been laid in front of me?”

—*Hope For Today* (B-27), p. 254

I don't see the need for a Sponsor.

“Sponsors respond to the needs of the sponsee in a loving and constructive manner. They listen to the situations presented by the sponsee, and if they have lived through similar experiences, they share how the Al-Anon principles helped them cope. Even if they have not gone through something similar, they can help the sponsee apply the Steps to the problem. I have also heard that receiving a sponsor's support during a difficult situation can magnify whatever help the group has offered.”

—*Hope For Today*, p. 272

How will my Sponsor help me?

“I was the ugly duckling who realized she's a swan—and other swans are attracted to me. What a joy!”

—*A Little Time for Myself* (B-34), p. 21

“As I continued going to Al-Anon, I started using the phone list and I also got a Sponsor. It felt so good to be able to call someone in between the meetings. I was able to see myself better by talking things out.”

—*A Little Time for Myself*, p. 57

“Sharing my concerns with my Sponsor is like talking with my eye doctor. My Sponsor gently guides me to heighten my own awareness—‘Is this better? Or this?’ In the end, the choice is mine.”

—*A Little Time for Myself*, p. 301

“During phone calls, my Sponsor says exactly what I needed, or thanks me when our conversation helped *her* with a challenge as well.”

—*A Little Time for Myself*, p. 245

“When I surrendered, I didn't lose power as I feared—I gained the power of insight, serenity, and perspective.”

—*A Little Time for Myself*, p. 275

Suggested Meeting Topics:

“How does learning I can trust other people help me to trust myself?” —*A Little Time for Myself*, p. 57

“In what ways does shame keep me from living fully today?” —*A Little Time for Myself*, p.152

“How do I choose the people with whom I can honestly share myself?” —*A Little Time for Myself*, p.159

HANDOUT #2

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE RELATIONSHIP

“Learning to value myself can begin by having the courage to find, and use, a Sponsor.”
— *Courage to Change* (B-16), p. 241

How will we meet? How often? For what length of time? Where? Public place or home? Should we meet in person or virtually or both? Phone? Text? Will we have a set time to meet?

“The frequency of contact with our Sponsors is a matter of mutual choice. The important thing is not how often we are in touch but that we *are*.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About* (P-31), p. 6

What will we do?

Work the Steps. Study Conference Approved Literature. Trust each other. Share honestly and practice confidentiality. Respect the other person's time boundaries.

“Sponsorship is a confidential relationship between two Al-Anon members who benefit from sharing experience, strength, and hope...[and] is focused on the Al-Anon principles.” —*Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover* (M-78)

“I had never dared to trust another person the way I trusted my first Al-Anon Sponsor.”
— *Courage to Change*, p. 241

What is expected?

Attend Al-Anon meetings regularly. Read Conference Approved Literature regularly. Be on time for scheduled meetings. Do not miss Sponsor/sponsee meetings except in the case of unexpected emergencies. Clear communication is essential.

“It is not a Sponsor but the entire program (The Twelve Steps, slogans, the Serenity Prayer, a Higher Power) that gives us our serenity. There are other resources: meetings, Al-Anon and Alateen literature, telephone and personal contact with other members. No one is alone if they've come to believe in a Power greater than themselves.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 7

“I took little steps by sharing minor details about myself. Once I knew we both desired and were willing to maintain a high degree of privacy, I felt comfortable to confide more intimate thoughts and feelings. When our relationship began to glide on the wings of trust, I asked if we could meet regularly twice a month for several hours at a time. I wanted her support and insight while I explored more deeply this person whom I didn't even really know—me.” —*Hope for Today* (B-27), p. 254

Suggested Meeting Topics:

What would be some details you and a potential Sponsor or sponsee would need to work out to make the relationship work for you?

Is there room for changes around what you've agreed upon, or is sticking to your initial plan important to you?

What would be your expectations of the sponsee? The Sponsor?

If your Sponsor is not available, how else could you get through a situation?

If your initial meeting with a potential Sponsor leaves you with some doubts about the relationship, what would you do?

HANDOUT #3

CHALLENGES OF GETTING AND USING A SPONSOR

CHALLENGES OF GETTING A SPONSOR

What stands in the way?

Fear: This is a risk that we are asked to take. Can we reach out to someone and ask for help? Recovery involves doing hard things, but we never take these risks alone. We are always accompanied by our Higher Power.

“Somehow I found a wonderful, loving Sponsor. I don’t know how I did it because I didn’t trust anyone. I suspect my Higher Power had something to do with it. Warm and compassionate, my Sponsor always said, ‘Love you lots!’ I never had to say it back.” — *From Survival to Recovery* (B-21), p. 21

Confusion: What is a Sponsor, anyway? Will I be judged, evaluated, or told what to do and how to do it? Will I be asked to do anything I don’t feel ready to do?

No. Absolutely not.

“If I want what you have, I need to become willing to do what you have done. For me this is the central tenet of Al-Anon’s practice of sponsorship.” — *Hope for Today* (B-27), p. 329

This is a clear, simple map: follow your Sponsor and you won’t get lost.

Low self-esteem: We come into Al-Anon battered and broken from ramming our heads up against an unyielding disease. We feel like failures and bad people. And now we are asked to reach out and ask someone to help us.

“At first, many of us feel reluctant to ask anyone to make such a big commitment to us. Alcoholism has often taken a heavy toll on our self-esteem, and we feel unworthy to ask for so much attention. We don’t want to impose or be a burden to anyone.” — *How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics* (B-32), p. 37

“It seemed to be such a big favor to ask of someone else on a permanent basis.” — *Sponsorship, What It’s All About* (P-31), p. 2

“Being too shy or too proud to do so could mean the difference between finding a new life in the program or returning to misery and loneliness.” — *Sponsorship, What It’s All About*, p. 5

“Do I love myself enough to use the tools of the program that have been laid in front of me?” — *Hope for Today*, p. 254

“Sponsorship works when people love themselves enough to ask for help and when others love themselves enough to say yes.” — *Hope for Today*, p. 329

Looking for the perfect fit: So many of us are perfectionists. We want to do it perfectly and to have it done perfectly for us. Perfection has no place in a human relationship.

Trust and confidentiality: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our program. Sponsorship is a confidential relationship. What is said to a Sponsor stays with a Sponsor.

“Sponsorship is a mutual and confidential sharing between two Al-Anon or Alateen members.” — *Sponsorship, What It’s All About*, p. 3

“Working with a Sponsor helps us to understand the critical importance of confidentiality.” — *Sponsorship, What It’s All About*, p. 6

Control: We have lived in the hope of false promises, unpredictability, and disappointment. It is understandably difficult to relinquish our illusion of control. Vulnerability is a risk, but one that so many have found incredibly rewarding and healing.

“Sponsorship is a commitment to practice healthy communication - not based on intimidation or demands.” — *Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover*

“The resistance came from fear of relationships, unwillingness to be known, and a false desire to be self-sufficient.” — *Sponsorship, What It’s All About*, p. 4

Concentrating on differences vs. similarities:

“Today I can be more tolerant of other views as I learn to take what I like and leave the rest. I don’t have to let outside issues distract me from my primary spiritual goal.” — *Courage To Change*, p. 52

Tradition Ten asks us to keep the focus on our Al-Anon program and on our primary spiritual aim: recovering from the effects of alcoholism. *That* is the common thread: our joint journey.

Who to ask?: A Sponsor gives of their time willingly because not only are they doing service, but they are suggesting to us the very thing they might need to hear that day. We start from the same place and are headed in the same direction.

“We look for someone who ‘has what we want’ and with whom we feel comfortable. It helps to choose someone who is committed to using the program in their own life.” — *Sponsorship, What It’s All About*, p. 5

As a newcomer, I'm afraid that I'm bothering them or that they may not have time for me.

"Sponsorship is about trust. It is about learning to reach out in a positive way, to be willing to ask for help to recover from the disease of alcoholism using the tools of the Al-Anon program." —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 4

"Sponsorship is not required, but experience shows that sponsorship is a valuable aid to personal understanding and use of the Al-Anon program of recovery...The group is a good place to get general, supportive help. But group time is limited...Personal details are best left to a Sponsor." —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 3

How to ask again if it doesn't work out?: Sponsor/sponsee relationships change, grow, deepen, and sometimes change so much that a new experience is needed. This is not failure; it is growth.

"Sometimes a Sponsor [or sponsee] may feel the need to let a member go, but if so, the situation can be approached with honesty and love." —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 10

This is an opportunity to negotiate a relationship differently than in the past, when manipulation and half-truths marked most communications.

CHALLENGES OF BEING A SPONSOR

Do I have to be all-knowing, have read every publication, worked all the Steps—twice—and be the absolute poster child for recovery?

No, of course not.

"Sponsors do not wave magic wands, resolve difficulties, make decisions, or become responsible *for* us." —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 6

"I was convinced I had to be perfect before I dared try to help anyone else...What I had wanted most from my Sponsor was acceptance, affection, reassurance, and a trustworthy listener...My Higher Power showed me I didn't have to talk much to be a sponsor. What I really needed to do was listen...It amazed me how helping others gave me insight regarding my situation." —*Hope for Today*, p. 132

"Growing up in a home that was critical, judgmental, and harsh, I felt like the ugly duck that didn't fit in...Coming into Al-Anon gave me the gift of being a Sponsor to some amazing women—intelligent, beautiful, and gifted. Why would *they* want *me* to be their Sponsor? Perhaps *I* was intelligent, beautiful, and gifted as well!" —*A Little Time for Myself*, p. 21

Being a Sponsor helps us practice setting boundaries and limits. We do not have to be

available 24/7, and we do not have to have all the answers; in fact, we don't have any. We share our experience, strength, and hope in a kind, loving way. We don't have to be a paragon of virtue and an example of ideal recovery. We are asked to be human: fallible, imperfect, open, and willing.

Suggested Meeting Topics:

Using a Sponsor: Tradition Ten and how outside issues remaining outside helps us preserve our relationships despite our differences.

Self Will: Believing "I can do this by myself"; *Courage to Change* p. 145

Intimacy: Reluctance to be vulnerable; *Courage to Change* p. 363

Fear: *Courage to Change*, pp. 66, 116, 123

HANDOUT #4

SERVICE SPONSORSHIP

“Service is the rent that I pay for the new life that Al-Anon has given me.” —as heard shared in a meeting.

“‘Putting love into action’ is one way of describing service. Without love and service, there could be no Al-Anon program. It has been said that the road to spiritual growth is paved with service...Those who have gone before tell us, ‘It’s easier, it’s more fun, and we double our knowledge.’” — *Service Sponsorship: Working Smarter Not Harder* (P-88), p. 2

What is a Service Sponsor?

A Service Sponsor is an Al-Anon member involved in service who guides someone in applying the Traditions and Concepts of service and shares their experience, strength, and hope about giving service to Al-Anon. It is through the energy of these trusted servants that newer members can find loving Service Sponsors.

“Service sponsorship helps both the Service Sponsor and the person who is sponsored acquire new skills while being an example of personal growth through service. Al-Anon Family Groups worldwide benefits when members are enthusiastic about service.” — *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27), p. 45

“Service is the practice of unconditional love.” —*How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics* (B-32), p. 100

Why do I need a Service Sponsor?

“Leadership qualities may seem overwhelming to some. Having Service Sponsors is helpful to all members at all levels of service in overcoming any feelings of self-doubt. Leadership begins with attending Al-Anon meetings on a regular basis and taking on group service positions. Good personal leadership at all levels also means welcoming the newest member into our fellowship and listening...We are all leaders at one time or another, and we can practice those qualities that will make us excellent leaders in all the service jobs in Al-Anon.” —*Paths to Recovery* (B-24), p. 304

Sometimes we realize that a Power greater than ourselves is running the show.

“If you’re at an ‘is that all there is?’ stage, the problem may be that you’re searching for more. Service is often the solution to that quest. To continue to grow, we need to work all parts of the program, not just the Steps. If it’s your time to climb to new heights, finding a Service Sponsor can ease the incline.” — *Service Sponsorship*, p. 3

“Work smarter not harder.” —*Service Sponsorship*, p. 4

“Recovery in Al-Anon is all about reaching out for help, and service is no exception...We may wish to find a Service Sponsor who can guide us. By asking for help in service, we again move toward healthy relationships and away from the outdated thinking that tells us we have to do everything on our own. No one has to do it alone. Al-Anon service is a team effort working, for a shared spiritual purpose.” — *Discovering Choices: Recovery in Relationships* (B-30), p. 244

“My Service Sponsor helped me learn how to delegate and give others an opportunity to grow.” — *Service Sponsorship*, p. 6

“We can set the example by being a trusted servant ourselves...As we expand our experiences in service we begin to see the bigger picture. We understand that decisions do have to be made. We learn about the interlinked work done by our World Service Office, the World Service Conference, our Area Assembly, districts, and group business meetings.” — *Paths to Recovery* (B-24), p. 257

“The trusted servants in our groups are those who volunteer to serve us in ways that earn our respect and appreciation.” — *How Al-Anon Works*, p. 126

Why should I be a Service Sponsor?

Service Sponsorship:

- builds teamwork
- shows that working with someone is more fun than tackling a problem alone
- develops your ability to work with others
- makes you more aware of your assets and character defects
- helps ease your way into service
- keeps you motivated to stay in service
- enhances spirituality
- teaches you how to laugh at yourself
- increases self-esteem
- illustrates that the best way to learn is to *teach*
- lightens the load since more hands make less work
- gives you a sense of purpose

— *Service Sponsorship*, p. 4

“Our Higher Power expresses Himself through each one of us in service if we are humble enough to ask His guidance through other trusted servants who went before us.” — *Service Sponsorship*, p. 7

Questions to answer:

Who would need a Service Sponsor?

What can a Service Sponsor do for me?

What can I do for a sponsee as their Service Sponsor?

Can my Service Sponsor also be my Sponsor?

Suggested Meeting Topics:

I have done my Steps; what can I learn from a Service Sponsor?

HANDOUT #5

I WANT TO BE A PERSONAL/SERVICE SPONSOR

When am I ready?

“Many of us feel ready to become Sponsors when our attitude toward the problems that brought us to Al-Anon or Alateen has changed from one of anxiety and hopelessness to one of faith and assurance...Understanding and patience, coupled with a willingness to devote time and care to a special relationship, are equally important.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About* (P-31), p. 7

How do I become a Sponsor?

“Most Sponsors...wait to be asked, recognizing that part of another member's personal recovery depends upon a willingness to reach out for help.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 7

A Sponsor is someone who has experience in the program, has worked the Al-Anon Steps, and has a Sponsor of their own.

Am I obliged if asked?

There is no obligation to sponsor, but “most members agree to sponsor if they can.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 7

“We keep Al-Anon's gifts by sharing them with others.” —*Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover* (M-78)

What is the role of a Sponsor?

A Sponsor/sponsee relationship is built on equality, anonymity, confidentiality, and trust. A Sponsor is willing to freely give time to the relationship and to listen without giving advice.

“As Sponsors we can...explain the Al-Anon principle of anonymity...accept, care, encourage, love.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, pp. 8-9

What is the best approach to sponsoring?

Whether structured or a casual approach, “there is no *one* best technique to sponsorship.” —*Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 9

At the beginning, getting to know each other is helpful, possibly by setting a time to get together each week. Discuss what is comfortable and expected from both sides. (See handout #2, “How to Navigate the Relationship.”)

What is the Sponsor's commitment?

Every relationship is unique. A Sponsor guides the sponsee through the Steps, encouraging communication with other members. It's an opportunity to help someone learn to use the tools of the program.

A Sponsor "gives understanding without pity, an open ear that does not judge." — *Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 4

What if I need to end the relationship?

"It is important to recognize that relationships sometimes change as we grow in Al-Anon." — *Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover*

Sometimes a Sponsor may feel the need to let a member go, or a sponsee may feel the need for a new Sponsor. The process of ending a Sponsor/sponsee relationship should be respectful, honest, and loving. It is suggested that communication about ending sponsorship be clear, direct, and kind.

How does sponsorship help growth in the program?

"Sponsorship is...an opportunity for growth—for both the Sponsee and the Sponsor." — *Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover*

"By helping others, Sponsors find they help themselves." — *Sponsorship, What It's All About*, p. 9

Sponsorship is an opportunity to practice having healthy relationships. For the sponsee, it is an opportunity to learn about service and its part in recovery, as well as an opportunity to be vulnerable, open, honest, and to trust another.

Suggested Meeting Topics:

If asked to be a Sponsor, what are your expectations?

Do you have a specific approach to sponsoring? Is it structured or casual?

As a Sponsor, do you initiate meet-ups or phone calls, or do you require the Sponsee to initiate?