

AA official Sponsor Pamphlet

What sponsorship actually is

A sponsor in Alcoholics Anonymous is an experienced member who guides another member, the **sponsee**, through the program. It is the most personal piece of A.A., and for many members it is what makes the rest of the program workable.

The arrangement is voluntary, free, and built on mutual respect. Sponsors share their experience, strength, and hope. They help the sponsee read A.A. literature, work the Twelve Steps, and navigate the rough first weeks and months.

It works because the two people share the same problem. Sponsors understand the rationalizations and the obstacles because they have faced them themselves.

At the heart of A.A. is the idea that one person with experience of alcohol problems helping another provides a kind of support nothing else can replicate.

What sponsors do

Step work guidance

Walking the sponsee through the Twelve Steps at the sponsee's pace, sharing how the sponsor worked each Step themselves.

Program education

Explaining A.A. principles, traditions, and practices in plain terms.

Availability

Being reachable in the moments that matter, especially in the first weeks.

Accountability

Keeping the sponsee honest with themselves about meetings, contact, and the Steps.

Meeting navigation

Introducing the sponsee to the fellowship and to different meeting formats.

Literature study

Reading and discussing A.A. materials together.

Personal sharing

Offering their own experience with the same problems, plainly and without sugar-coating.

Spiritual guidance

Helping the sponsee engage with the spiritual aspects of the program on their own terms, without imposing the sponsor's personal beliefs.

AA official Sponsor Pamphlet

What sponsors do *not* do is equally important.

They are not therapists, financial advisors, employers, or caretakers. They do not make decisions for sponsee's, take responsibility for sponsee's recovery, or enable destructive behavior. Sponsors do not ask for money, loans, or financial assistance. Sponsors do not ask for exchanges of services for their time. A sponsor is not an AA guru, or fixer.

Finding a sponsor

The best place to find a sponsor is at meetings. Listen to people share. Notice who has what you want in recovery. Notice who demonstrates the principles you would like to develop.

Qualities to look for

Solid sobriety

Substantial continuous time, often a year or more.

Active program

Attends meetings regularly and works their own program.

Step experience

Has worked all Twelve Steps and continues to practice them.

Availability

Has the time and willingness to commit.

Same gender

Traditionally recommended to keep the relationship focused on recovery.

Compatibility

Someone you can be honest with, even when it is uncomfortable.

Program knowledge

Fluent in A.A. literature and principles.

Humility

Recognizes they are still learning, not playing the expert.

Making the ask

Do not rush. Attend meetings, get to know people, listen to what they share. Consider asking someone to be a temporary sponsor while you decide, or take guidance from several people while you learn the program.

AA official Sponsor Pamphlet

When you are ready, ask privately after a meeting or by phone. Most experienced members are honored to be asked and will either accept or help you find someone else. Being turned down is not personal; it usually reflects the sponsor's current capacity.

The relationship

Sponsorship combines elements of mentorship, fellowship, and spiritual guidance. Most relationships begin with regular contact, often daily phone calls in early recovery. The sponsor suggests meetings, reading, and a starting point on the Steps.

Communication frequency and methods should be discussed up front: daily check-ins in early recovery, weekly meetings for step work, availability for crises, agreed-upon contact times.

Healthy dynamics

Honesty

Complete openness about struggles, thoughts, and actions.

Respect

Mutual respect for time, boundaries, and perspectives.

Commitment

Dedication to the process from both parties.

Growth

Focus on spiritual and personal development.

Boundaries

Clear understanding of roles and limitations.

Patience

Recognition that recovery is a process, not an event.

Like any relationship, sponsorship can hit rough patches. Disagreements, personality conflicts, or changing needs are normal. Address them directly and honestly. Sometimes the relationship needs to end or change, and that is not failure. As sponsees gain experience the relationship usually evolves from intensive guidance to peer support, and many sponsees eventually become sponsors themselves.

Why it works

The relationship benefits both parties: the sponsee gains something concrete to work with, and the sponsor stays connected to their own recovery.

AA official Sponsor Pamphlet

For the sponsee

Personalized guidance

Individual attention and a recovery path that fits the sponsee.

Accountability

Someone to check in with and report progress to.

Experience sharing

Learning from someone who has faced the same problems.

Crisis support

Someone to call during difficult moments related to recovery.

Program education

Structured learning about A.A. principles and practices.

Confidence building

Encouragement to face the work of recovery.

Social connection

An entry point into the broader fellowship.

Spiritual development

Guidance through the spiritual aspects of the program.

For the sponsor

Helping others reinforces the sponsor's own recovery and gives daily life purpose. Many sponsors report that working with a sponsee keeps them connected to their own early-recovery experience and grateful for their progress.

For the fellowship

Sponsorship keeps the program's knowledge and experience moving from one member to the next. It is how A.A. perpetuates itself without a central authority.

Common questions

Timing and readiness

Most experienced members suggest getting a sponsor as soon as possible, including at your first meeting. You do not need to be 'ready' or have anything figured out. The sponsor's job is to help you with both.

AA official Sponsor Pamphlet

Changing sponsors

Perfectly acceptable. Personality conflicts, different approaches, life changes — any of these can mean a different sponsor would serve your recovery better. Most sponsors understand and support the change.

Multiple or temporary sponsors

A.A.'s pamphlet on sponsorship recommends a single sponsor for newcomers, noting that going from sponsor-to-sponsor risks hearing only what you want to hear rather than what you need. That said, a temporary sponsor is a practical option while you find someone permanent. Some members also draw on multiple people for different aspects of the program. Whichever arrangement you use, be clear about expectations with everyone involved.

Cost and obligations

Sponsorship is free. There are no financial obligations and no formal contracts. The only 'payment' is the sponsee's commitment to their recovery and their willingness to help others when the time comes.