

NEWCOMERS MEETINGS

*A guide for leaders and other OA members
interested in meetings for beginning members*

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Newcomers meetings introduce newcomers to the basics of our program. The topics include the three-fold nature of the disease of compulsive eating (physical, emotional and spiritual); abstaining from compulsive eating; how it works; the Twelve Steps; the Twelve Traditions; and the Tools of Recovery.

TYPES OF NEWCOMERS MEETINGS

1. *Public information.* These meetings are usually open to professionals, family and friends as well as newcomers. The topics are usually covered in one or two specially scheduled two- to three-hour meetings.
2. *A newcomer series.* Usually a one-hour session is devoted to each topic, with additional sessions scheduled as needed. Typically a series includes six meetings, but may range from four to twelve. They are generally scheduled before regular meetings, although they can take place separately and apart from regular meetings. When coupled with a regular OA meeting, members who usually attend the regular meeting can participate in the newcomers meetings and invite newcomers to accompany them to the regular meeting. A few groups prefer to have the newcomers and regular meetings simultaneously, in nearby rooms.
3. *OA weekly meetings designated as newcomers meetings.* These meetings focus on the basics, and the series runs continuously.
4. *Combination of public information and newcomer series.* A public information night or afternoon is followed by a scheduled newcomer series.

MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

The purpose of newcomers meetings is to welcome newcomers and give them the opportunity to listen to the experience, strength and hope of recovering members. Newcomers are also encouraged to participate in discussions and to ask questions. Most newcomers meetings begin with a long-term, abstaining member sharing about the disease of compulsive eating and our program of recovery, followed by discussion and a time for questions and answers. While OA members are invited to attend these meetings to greet and share their recovery with newcomers, the meeting is for newcomers and should not be dominated by the leader or by other OA members who happen to attend. The leader is responsible for seeing that it does not turn into a discussion between experienced OA members.

Newcomer participation is encouraged by an intimate, informal, friendly atmosphere, usually with chairs in a circle or around a large table, or if the seating arrangements are primarily theater style, by including a break to encourage more personal sharing.

Newcomers need access to resources. We suggest that you have a good supply of current meeting lists at any newcomers meeting. The Newcomer Packet available from WSO includes pertinent literature. Groups have the option of either distributing packets at one time or providing pamphlets or pocket cards to newcomers when relevant to a particular meeting topic. In addition, members might contribute *Lifeline* issues to give or lend to newcomers. We suggest that newcomers meetings display an ample supply of OA literature for newcomers to purchase.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS AND SPEAKERS

1. Arrive early to welcome newcomers.
2. Inform the group that OA is a Twelve-Step program patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous.
3. Introduce the speaker to share his or her story. Be sure to note that the speaker shares only from personal experience and expresses individual opinions; no one speaks for the OA Fellowship as a whole, or even for the group.
4. The speaker qualifies, tells his or her story and incorporates the topic of the meeting. In qualifying, describe your identification as a compulsive eater—your obsession, compulsive behaviors and body when you came to OA and the length of your abstinence. Describe your recovery on all three levels. Letting newcomers know what it was like when you came to the program and what it's like now will help the newcomer to identify and believe change is possible. Sharing what you did to put down the food and maintain abstinence provides insight into what they might do to recover.
5. Assure participants that their anonymity will be respected and their participation and sharing will be held in confidence. Inform newcomers that anyone who has a desire to stop eating compulsively is welcome at all OA meetings, but some meetings are closed to non-members (professionals, family, friends, etc.). However, by group conscience, non-members may be invited.
6. Follow guidelines for sharing (see Suggested Meeting Format for guidelines and definition of cross talk).
7. Refer to OA literature in leading, discussing and/or answering questions to familiarize newcomers with the value of our literature.
8. In closing, refer newcomers to literature to further explain the topic. Remind them that “opinions are those of the speakers and not OA as a whole,” and to respect one another’s anonymity. Be sure to invite newcomers to check out the list of meetings and to attend as many as they can. Encourage the exchange of phone numbers. Above all, tell them to “keep coming back.”

MEETING TOPICS

1. The disease of compulsive eating (physical, emotional, spiritual)

Read “Our Invitation to You” and/or include the following points in your lead:

- We suffer from the disease of compulsive overeating. We are not immoral, weak-willed, bad or disgusting—and we are not alone.
- We have a progressive disease characterized by an obsession of the mind and compulsive behavior. Our common problem is threefold: physical, emotional and spiritual.
- The concept of compulsive eating as a disease is spelled out in all our literature. Especially pertinent are the OA book *Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition* (particularly “Our Invitation To You,” pages 1-6, and the Appendixes, pages 229-251) and the pamphlets

Questions and Answers and *A Program of Recovery*. The book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, on which our program is based, gives many parallel insights into addiction as a disease. Let newcomers know that “Our Invitation to You” is often read as part of the meeting format.

- We have found that the disease of compulsive eating can be arrested, one day at a time, but cannot be cured. Point out that once the “diagnosis” is accepted we can follow the OA “prescription” for recovery: abstinence and the Twelve Steps
- Discuss with newcomers:
 - The symptoms of the disease of compulsive eating.
 - The differences between normal eaters and compulsive eaters. The discussion on pages 2-3 of *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous* can be very useful and powerful in this connection.
 - Our powerlessness over controlling compulsive eating with misdirected willpower.
 - The miracle of recovery through the Twelve Steps: the freedom from the food obsession, and the freedom to not want to eat foods that used to beckon to us.
 - The importance of being willing to follow the OA program rather than insisting on prior intellectual understanding of the problem.
- OA does not pretend to be a medical program or a storehouse of nutritional knowledge. Members who want information of this nature must seek it from other sources. OA does not endorse any particular food plan. The pamphlets *Dignity of Choice* and *A Plan of Eating: A Tool for Living—One Day at a Time* provide guidance.
- Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive eating and to carry the message of recovery. We need to support every OA member, instilling hope, trust, freedom and joy, rather than feelings of guilt, fear and hardship. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively, which is Tradition Three. OA does not weigh members, sign them up, monitor their eating habits or keep tabs on them in any way. The important thing is to keep coming back and work the program with others. (See “How Does an Individual Join OA?” on page 7 of *Questions and Answers* and “How Do You Become a Group Member?” on page 6 of the *OA Handbook for Members, Groups and Service Bodies*.)

2. How to abstain from compulsive eating one day at a time

Abstinence is refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. OA members have different plans of eating. Many follow a specific food plan; others are comfortable with eating moderate meals or simply not bingeing or purging. Some OA members weigh and measure their food. Our plans vary in the number of meals and foods to include or exclude. The OA pamphlets *Dignity of Choice* and *A Plan of Eating* provide suggestions on how to meet individual needs.

The leader or speaker is encouraged to share his or her own story of becoming abstinent. The process of abstaining from compulsive eating is a one day at a time, one hour at a time, even

one minute at a time process. The pamphlets *A Commitment to Abstinence* and *Before You Take that First Compulsive Bite*, and the pocket card *Think First* contain suggestions on how to avoid compulsive eating.

Members attending the meeting may add their suggestions to the following methods of abstaining from compulsive eating one day at a time:

- Focus on “just for today”: abstain for just this 24 hours, this hour or this minute, if necessary.
- Get a sponsor and stay in touch on a daily basis—even several times a day if necessary. Talking about food specifics can be helpful, and sharing feelings and personal problems is also important.
- Some members find that postponing compulsive eating—until this afternoon, tonight or tomorrow—and continuing to postpone it helps them get and maintain abstinence.
- Attend as many meetings as possible.
- Call other OA members, newcomers or people with more experience. You help the person you call as much as you help yourself.
- Look for someone else to help. Sharing how OA has been a benefit to us is how members “keep” their recovery.
- Read OA and AA literature, keeping it around the house and carrying some in your purse or pocket.
- Pray—in whatever way is meaningful for you, even if you’re “acting as if.”
- Change routines, especially at times most conducive to compulsive eating. This helps to change old patterns.
- Make a list of things to do instead when you have thoughts about food or the urge to eat compulsively, and then do one of them.
- Get together with other OA members for non-eating activities or to enjoy an abstinent meal.
- Begin working the Twelve Steps.

3. How It Works: The Twelve Steps as a suggested program of recovery

To introduce newcomers to the Twelve Steps, read or paraphrase “How It Works” from *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book), Chapter 5.

Assure newcomers that OA is a spiritual program and does not follow any religious doctrine. Members practice the spiritual principles of the program with a personal Higher Power of their own understanding.

Emphasize that the Twelve Steps are the basis of our program of recovery. We try to work on them—and let them work on us—for the rest of our lives, one day at a time. There are no “musts” in OA; these Steps are simply suggested, based on the experience of recovering OA members. They evolved in AA as a result of experience in recovery.

Share how you have worked the Steps and how they have helped your recovery. Encourage newcomers to study the Steps with their sponsor and OA friends and to apply them in their daily

lives. We do not expect to be perfect at doing this, just to make progress.

The pamphlets *To the Newcomer* and *Questions and Answers* provide an introduction to our Twelve-Step program of recovery. Since the source of the Twelve Steps is Alcoholics Anonymous, we encourage newcomers to read the Big Book for themselves in addition to OA literature. Be sure to have copies of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous* and *The Twelve Step Workbook of Overeaters Anonymous* available to lend, sell or give away.

4. The Twelve Traditions

While OA functions with very little obvious organization, adherence to the Traditions assures the survival of the Fellowship. Applying the Traditions to our relationships in and out of OA strengthens our spirituality and helps maintain abstinence. *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*, along with AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *AA Comes of Age* are excellent sources of information on the origin and importance of the Traditions. OA's pamphlet *The Twelve Traditions* provides a good introduction for the newcomer.

Leaders may relate their own experience in using the Traditions to help newcomers understand the importance of anonymity; principles before personalities; group conscience; self-support; OA's non-affiliation with other organizations; and our sole membership requirement, a desire to stop eating compulsively. Leaders might share how living the Traditions helps them stay abstinent.

It is equally important to point out what OA does not do. For example, OA does not solicit members or attempt to convince anyone to join the Fellowship. Nor does it keep membership files, participate in research, follow up on its members, give medical or psychological advice, offer any kind of social services or counseling, accept reimbursement for its services or accept contributions from non-OA sources.

Since the Traditions are significant for our personal recovery and the Fellowship's survival and growth, this topic is of great importance at newcomers meetings.

5. The Tools of Recovery

The nine tools of recovery—a plan of eating, sponsorship, meetings, telephone, writing, literature, action plan, anonymity, service—are described in our pamphlet, *The Tools of Recovery*. The pamphlet is not meant to be read aloud at the meeting, but to be used as a basis for the explanation of each tool and how the tools have contributed to working the Steps and maintaining abstinence. When sharing your experience, strength and hope, include how the tools have supported your recovery.

Special attention should be given to sponsorship: what it is, how to get a sponsor, when and how to change sponsors. In addition to the tools pamphlet, newcomers and sponsors can find helpful information in the pamphlets *A Guide for Sponsors* and *Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps*.

6. More About OA

A complete session may be devoted to each of the topics below, or they may be incorporated into other sessions.

- Literature

Newcomers are interested in knowing about every possible source of help available in OA. One of the most important things we can do for newcomers may be to introduce them to the publications available from the World Service Office. Note that *Alcoholics Anonymous* is often referred to as the Big Book and *Overeaters Anonymous* is called the Brown Book. *Alcoholics Anonymous* and publications about our illness and the OA program are available from the World Service Office. Recovery CDs are also available from WSO, and information and inspiration are posted on the OA Web site. We suggest that you have a good supply of approved literature available. Include *Lifeline*, our monthly magazine of recovery, often considered a “meeting on the go.” Describe these publications and how you have used these sources to support your recovery. Encourage newcomers to read them.

- Spiritual awakening

Discuss what this experience has meant for others, beginning with Bill W., cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous. See *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., pages 8-14, 569-570 and the chapters “We Agnostics,” “Working with Others” and “A Vision for You.” Also pertinent is “Step Twelve” in *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*. Encourage newcomers to discover what “spiritual experience” means for them, and emphasize that this is a deeply personal matter. Suggest that they read *Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition* and *Lifeline* to learn about the experiences of other OA members. The experiences of AA members are recorded in AA’s book *Came to Believe*.

- Service

Service is the basis of our program of recovery and the essence of spiritual growth. Explain briefly the service structure (intergroup, region, WSO), particularly explaining the local intergroup and what it does. Newcomers may find useful information in the pamphlet *OA Handbook for Members, Groups and Service Bodies*. Leaders and speakers may find the *Service, Traditions and Concepts Workshop Manual* a supplemental resource. Share how service has contributed to your recovery.

- History

- The original AA experience as described in *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *AA Comes of Age*.
- How OA evolved from AA. Leaders may familiarize themselves with OA history by reading the book *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams* and “Rozanne’s Story” in *Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition*.

- The family and significant others

The leader and other OA members share on how they needed to help their non-OA relatives understand compulsive eating and the recovery process and how they overcame difficulties. The pamphlet *To the Family of the Compulsive Eater* was written to assist

newcomers in explaining the disease, the process of recovery and how the family can help.

- Pithy wisdom

The Serenity Prayer and OA slogans, which include:

- Abstinence is the most important thing in my life without exception
- Easy does it
- Let go and let God
- Live and let live
- Keep it simple
- One day at a time
- Nothing tastes as good as abstinence feels