

Younger People in AA



Helpline 0800 917 7650

Alcoholics Anonymous® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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Younger People in AA

It is commonly thought that people do not become 'alcoholics' until they are in their 30's, 40's or beyond, and whilst this can certainly be the case, many have found that their drinking became a problem almost as soon as they started. These 'younger people' have found that alcoholism is something that can affect people of all ages and, similarly, that age is no barrier to recovery from alcoholism.

Alcoholics Anonymous now has more young people than ever, many joining in their twenties or in their teens. Some areas of the UK have even started their own young people's groups.

In this pamphlet you will find the experiences of some of AA's younger members between the ages of 18 to 25 who have contributed their stories. Although these stories can be quite different depending on the contributor's particular situation or background, you may notice some common themes that underpin them all. If you find that you are able to relate to some parts of these stories then you may be interested in finding out more about AA and how it may be able to help you.

Many might see AA as the end of the road, but as the experiences collected in the pamphlet confirm, it can also be the end of a lot of pain and suffering and to the beginning of a new and meaningful life.

Charlotte's Story

I can still remember my first drink, I was twelve and at a family party. It was the year alcopops had first come onto the market and they were still a novelty. My father bought a few bottles and told my brother, my cousins and I that if we were really good, we could have one each. I remember the warm glow I felt when I drank mine, it was like the missing link, the thing that made me feel ok, took away the fear and made me feel like I thought everyone else felt. Comfortable in my own skin for the first time. It wore off and the fear came back. I got really scared as the adults started to fight, so remembering how good the drink had made me feel I snuck downstairs, found the two remaining bottles and drank them to get that feeling again. That was pretty much the pattern of my drinking until I came to AA.

From then on if ever I was scared, panicky, angry or upset I would steal alcohol from my parents, drinking their booze and topping up the bottles with water so it would still look full. I spent my teens seeing a number of professionals because of my anxiety and panic attacks but I didn't cooperate with them. As far as I was concerned it was alcohol that solved my problem. I hated the taste but adored the effect it gave me, I reasoned with myself that alcohol was my medicine, the cure for all my insecurities, and that medicine didn't always taste nice.

Things got really bad when I turned seventeen. I got a Saturday job, and suddenly I didn't need to steal what little I could from my parents, I had money and looked eighteen. I could by my own and drink as much as I wanted. I got my

first pay check one Saturday and turned up for work drunk the next. I went from drinking to get sleep and get homework done to drinking 24/7. I could sense that there was something wrong with what I was doing, I kept getting into trouble and my friends started to say things, so I went to an AA meeting one day to shut them up. I walked out halfway through. I reasoned that it was impossible to be an alcoholic at seventeen, I was under the legal drinking age for God's sake!! Plus drinking hadn't cost me a driving licence, a marriage, a job...

I carried on drinking for another two years, and what I couldn't see at the time was that the reason my drinking hadn't made me lose any of these things was because it stopped me from gaining them in the first place (in fact the only thing I had gained through drinking was a metal pin in my leg from falling over drunk and breaking my ankle). Whilst all my friends learned to drive, went on to university, got engaged etc, I just drank to function normally. I had to drink to go to college, go out socially, do the housework, to get out of bed in the end. I still refused to believe alcohol was the problem, I thought life and other people were. If only life wasn't so unfair to me! If only the people in my life were more reasonable! If you had my life and my problems, you would drink too!

Then one day something clicked. My brother took a bad fall, hitting his head hard. When he woke up the next day he complained of a headache and his left eye was filled with blood. It looked like the fall had caused a brain haemorrhage. I couldn't deal with what was happening so while we were waiting for someone to come and take him to A&E, I ran to the local off licence for a bottle of vodka.

When the call came through to tell me my brother was going to be OK, I just couldn't lie to myself anymore. I wasn't drinking to deal with the exceptionally bad terrible life I had, I was drinking because of something within me. Everybody has to face the difficulty of seeing someone they love hospitalised at some point, but other people wouldn't need a drink to cope with it. I drank for no other reason than I had an addictive personality. The problem didn't stem from people or situations, it stemmed from me. I decided to give AA another try.

I got to a meeting the next day and this time I listened to the stories of the other people there. I was amazed! They described the things I felt, the things I did too (talking whilst holding my breath, buying my bottles from a different place each day so the staff wouldn't know how much I really drank, and the lengths I went to dispose of the empties without my parents finding out...), they were describing me! Unlike the doctors and therapists I'd seen these people really did know how I felt inside, because they had felt it too, and got through it using the AA programme. The man in the chair at my first meeting was eight years sober but had once drunk himself to the point of death and had undergone a liver transplant. I thought to myself that although my drinking hadn't got that bad (yet) I couldn't stop drinking on my own, and that if AA could pull this man back from death's door, then they could help me too.

That was two and a half years ago. I'm 22 now and I've never looked back. I am slowly becoming the person I tried to become by drinking. I'm finding in AA what I was looking for in alcohol. I feel happy and content within myself (most of the time!) and I can face life

head on instead of running away from it. I have many more close friends now than I ever had in the past and my social life is busier than ever. I don't wake up feeling like I can't go on anymore, my suicidal feelings have vanished. I thought my life was over when I joined AA but getting sober was just the beginning of a much better life, one I never thought possible.

Are You An Alcoholic!

AA will never diagnose anyone as an alcoholic - it's up to you to decide, but if you are concerned about your drinking try answering the following questions as honestly as you can. It might help you decide for yourself.

1. Does drinking make you careless of your friends and family?
2. Do you drink to overcome shyness or to build your self confidence?
3. Do you drink to 'escape'?
4. Is drinking making you unhappy?
5. Do you ever drink alone?
6. Have you missed work or school because of drink?
7. Has drinking made you less ambitious?
8. Is your reputation suffering because of drink?
9. Is drinking preventing you from achieving your full potential in life?
10. Are people around you concerned about how you are drinking?
11. Do you ever feel regret after drinking?
12. Are you having problems with money because of drink?
13. Do you find that drinking takes you places you normally wouldn't go to?
14. Does drinking ever make you do things you have felt ashamed of?
15. Do you ever crave alcohol?
16. Do you sometimes need to drink to help you sleep?
17. Do you sometimes 'reward' yourself with a drink, perhaps at certain times of day?
18. Have you ever had a 'blackout' (complete failure to remember events) as a result of drinking?

19. If you have been honest with a doctor about your drinking have they shown concern and advised treatment?
20. Have you ever been in a hospital or caused harm to yourself or others as a result of drinking?

These are just some of the things that thousands of recovering alcoholics have experienced at one time or another while they were drinking.

Andy's Story

My drinking really started to kick off when I was 15. I'd drunk and even got drunk before this but it was on meeting a group of like minded 'outsiders' that weekend drinking became habitual. I knew from the start that my drinking was different, not just recreational fun but a release from my unbearable existence. I would spend Friday afternoons in school dreaming about the weekend to come, not so much looking forward to seeing my friends but imagining how fabulously drunk I would get so that all the horrible meaninglessness of the world would evaporate from my consciousness.

I suffered severe physical side-effects to my drinking, vomiting every time I drank, and the most crippling, excruciating hangovers. It occurs to me now that someone else having this reaction to alcohol might have chosen to take it easy, but I just kept coming back again and again for more of the same. I accepted that this was what I had to pay for the honey glazed world that awaited me each time I took that first drink, the first drink that inevitably led to sweet oblivion.

I soon found that I could encourage friends to join me for drinking sessions on Sunday afternoons or during the week and then it was just a case of filling in the days until I found myself getting drunk every night of the week. I'd also made the unfortunate discovery that drinking on my own was just as good, if not preferable, to drinking with other people.

I managed to fund my habit at that time by pleading with my parents to give me money, scrounging drinks off friends or simply by being 'in the right place at the tight time' - although

if I managed to take one drink I almost always got drunk, whatever it took. By the time I was 18 and legally old enough to buy alcohol, even I could see that I had a serious drinking problem, perhaps even an 'alcoholic' - which I thought was quite amusing, although the novelty factor would soon wear off, the real problems being yet to come.

It was when I was at university, with my own flat and my own money, that the true extent of my powerlessness over alcohol became apparent. I started to drink in the mornings, going to the pub every lunchtime and evening with my friends and making sure I had more alcohol at home in case I needed to finish the job. I found that I had no control whatsoever, no matter how much I tried to control the situation, and within six months I had stopped going to college altogether. I avoided all contact with people and felt a chill run down my spine every time I heard the phone or the doorbell, and only left the building to buy another bottle of cheap vodka or gin. I ended up back at home, confused and alarmed at what was happening to me although by no means ready to admit defeat.

I knew that if I were to have any life at all I would have to stop drinking altogether, which would be easy enough I thought, and besides, the thought of drinking 'in moderation' still fills me with horror today. From this point forward my life seemed to run in six month cycles, starting with a firm resolve to put my life in order and ending with ever more disturbing blackouts and benders. Before long I'd proved myself incapable of getting an education, working, holding down a flat, holding down a relationship and all because I drank too much and, worst of all, I'd proved to myself that I couldn't stop.

During the last two years of my drinking my life became bleaker and emptier than I could ever have imagined. My self hate was so severe that I had severed relations with my family and friends and thought about suicide every waking hour. The pain was so great and my options so few. I simply couldn't carry on drinking, so it seemed as though the only option was to kill myself. The thought of living a life in which I didn't drink was firstly incomprehensible and secondly impossible.

I didn't believe AA would work for me. I was finally shown the door of AA by the Samaritans who I had been pestering for years with my many problems and who always suggested I contact AA. I never listened until eventually, at the age of 21, I was so lost and so beaten that finally something seemed to get through and I thought to myself "well, I may as well give AA a run for its money, and if it doesn't work I can always return to Plan A and top myself". That was the beginning of my recovery and I have never looked back and am convinced to this day that joining AA was the best decision I ever made. If I hadn't made the decision to come to AA and stay sober one day at a time I honestly believe I would be dead today or - even worse - still drinking.

I have now found that I can live a life without alcohol and the life I have now is better than it ever was during or even before my drinking started. What's more I have a wealth of friends in the Fellowship and I am able to help others who are affected by alcoholism. Today I have a career and a house and, more importantly, the trust of my friends and relatives and, most important of all, I have peace of mind. This is all thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Melissa's Story

My name is Melissa and I am an alcoholic.

I started drinking when I was twelve years old, I would drink as much as I could and as often as I could, alcohol seemed to be the answer to all my problems, I loved what it could do for me.

I was brought up with alcoholism, my father is an alcoholic and I was drinking to escape from the mayhem at home. When my mother and father's marriage broke down and finally ended my answer was to drink more to take the pain away. I felt so lonely and scared and I felt I had no one to talk to; my sister and brother had their own problems they were suffering also from what I know now as the "Family Illness".

As well as drinking I started deliberately self-harming (DSH) that was like a release for me and I could then block out the pain I felt on the inside. This behaviour carried on until I got to Alcoholics Anonymous.

I had a Social Worker who arranged some respite care; she thought that a break from my family was what I needed. I wanted to stay there for good because I settled down and felt safe in this new environment. At the age of fifteen I wasn't drinking because I wanted to, I was drinking because I needed to, I didn't know about the phenomenon of craving that was beyond my control (Alcoholics Anonymous p xxviii / L26).

My school work was badly affected; I hardly ever went to school. I was too busy drinking or getting suspended. On the days without alcohol I was very shaky and sweated a lot, if I went to school after drinking alcohol the school would

phone my Social Worker who would collect me and take me to her department.

My dad worked all day and when my drinking got out of control I began to suffer from blackouts I have learned that these things can happen to people who drink too much. Days would go by and I didn't know what was happening I was also in and out of hospital with stomach and liver problems. I started taking overdoses because I couldn't live like this any longer and I felt I had nothing to live for I was only existing and stealing for my next drink. I had so much time off school that I eventually got expelled with no qualifications.

My Dad now had enough of my stealing from him for drink.

I had been seeing a child psychologist and went up in front of Children's Panels because of my behaviour, when I reached the age of sixteen I ended up in hostels. The following year I ended up in a Psychiatric hospital for five weeks, I felt safe and secure there, I didn't want to come out. Not long after that I got to Alcoholics Anonymous, I only went because I had nowhere else to go and I was hungry. I knew I had a drink problem but I thought I was too young to be an alcoholic, I had just turned eighteen, it was suggested by members of Alcoholics Anonymous to just keep coming to the meetings and if I came long enough I could find out if I was an alcoholic. This would be left up to me to decide so I went to many meetings. This was good because I was getting plenty of identification but at the same time I didn't think I could stop drinking. I was told that I could stop "One Day at a Time" and to start by not taking the first drink. I was now no longer alone.

Through time I joined a group, got telephone numbers, stayed out of pubs and clubs, got sober company, found a Sponsor and learned to trust people again. This was great for me. If I had a problem I only needed to make a phone call to her and talk over my problem.

I felt for the first time somebody was there for me. I learned that I couldn't do this by myself I needed Alcoholics Anonymous and a Higher Power in my life.

I was also told if I didn't believe what I heard to believe what I saw, I found the people helpful and encouraging. I felt good about this and I started to get some hope. I was told that I could get better and that I need never drink again. I decided to do as suggested and throw myself into AA. My sponsor took me through the Programme of Recovery and I started to find out about myself and why I had taken alcohol in the first place.

Through working hard on myself and with the help of good sponsorship and my Higher Power my attitudes and my life slowly began to change, I had to live "One Day at a Time".

I have not had a drink for six years and this truly is beyond my wildest dreams. In my six years of sobriety I have tried to involve myself in service, I have been to prisons with the prison sponsors, schools, universities, hospitals and had a turn at telephone helpline and finally settled in Public Information. This has been so good for me and helped me in my recovery.

Thanks to the Fellowship and my Higher Power I got a place at university and now have a degree and that has opened new doors for me. I have a

flat of my own and a car to take me to work and to my meetings.

I am trying hard to remain responsible, I have many nice new friends for which I am grateful and with the help of God I hope to stay in Alcoholics Anonymous and try to be a good example.

Alcoholics Anonymous - Questions and Answers

Q Is Alcoholism an illness?

A Yes we believe so. Alcoholism is characterised by a mental obsession coupled with a physical allergy.

Q Am I too young to be an alcoholic?

A No this illness has no age boundaries.

Q I can't be an alcoholic because I don't drink every day.

A It doesn't matter how much or how often we drink, it's what drink does to us.

Q Will I ever be able to drink again?

A In AA we don't say we will never drink again, we say "Just I won't take the first drink".

Q Is AA a religious organisation?

A No, although some members have a strong faith some have no faith and others are not quite sure. We have spiritual values such as honesty, open mindedness and willingness.

Q Will I have to say I am and alcoholic?

A No, the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Q Am I a bad person because I can't stop drinking?

A No, in AA we find out we are sick people trying to get well (not bad people trying to be good).

Q Does AA have rules and regulations?

A No, there are no rules in AA.
Only suggestions.

Q Is it important to attend AA meetings?

A Yes, if we want to stay sober we are advised to attend as many AA meetings as we can.

Q How does it work?

A Staying away from the first drink a day at a time by following the AA programme and sharing our experience, strength and hope.

In AA we find a way to stay stopped on a daily basis. We find the best way of achieving this is to get to as many meetings as we can at first, to get plenty of ideas. By listening to stories and experiences of other non drinking alcoholics just like us we came to believe AA can work for us as well.

We follow the 12 Step Programme, read AA literature, including pamphlets such as this one, identifying with the stories. We safeguard our sobriety by helping other alcoholics in AA, carrying the message as it was carried to us, giving it away to keep it.

Gradually things start to fall into place. We find in AA what we were looking for in the bottom of a bottle. A feeling of peace and serenity (most of the time) and the ability to lead a normal life.

We hope this leaflet and the stories it contains will help you to gain a foothold in lasting sobriety.

Where do I find AA?

You can find AA in meetings in almost every town and city and many villages in the UK - just look in the phonebook to make contact with AA members in your area.

If you want to make immediate contact with AA you can ring the helpline:

0800 917 7650

For more information about AA you can write to:

Alcoholics Anonymous
PO Box 1
10 Toft Green
YORK
YO1 7NJ

Or visit the website
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

I am responsible

When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help, I want
the hand of AA always to be there.
And for that: I am responsible.



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