

Introduction.

Alcoholics Anonymous has a programme for a way of life without alcohol. It is working for over two million people throughout the world.

This leaflet aims to answer the questions most frequently asked by newcomers – including ourselves when *we* first came to AA.

What is Alcoholism?

There is no 'standard' definition but most AA members view alcoholism as an illness, a progressive, incurable illness that *can* be arrested. Most of us agree that the illness takes the form of an abnormal physical reaction followed by a mental obsession with drink which cannot be broken by willpower alone.

What is Alcoholics Anonymous?

AA is a self supporting Fellowship of people from all walks of life who because of their drinking have found themselves in trouble – at work, home or school; with health or money; with the police or authority in general. We work at developing a way of life *without* alcohol and to achieve this, we need the help and support of other alcoholics in AA.

Am I an alcoholic?

If you keep drinking to the point of drunkenness; if you get into trouble when you drink; if you are aware that your drinking is costing you more than just money, you could be an alcoholic. No one in AA will tell you: only *you* can decide. If you feel the need to control or cut down on your drinking, you may already have a problem.

What can I do if I am worried about my drinking?

Get help! Call 0845 7697555 and talk to us in strict confidence or visit www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk.

Is AA a religious organisation?

No. AA is not allied to any religious organisation. Followers of all religions *and* those of no religious belief are equally welcome.

There's a lot of talk about God, though, isn't there?

AA members believe that they have found the solution to their drink problems *not* through personal willpower but through a power greater than themselves. Some people call this power 'God'; others, a 'God of their understanding' or 'higher power'. Ours is a *spiritual* programme providing the same hope and help for *all* believers and *all* non-believers.

What does 'anonymity' really mean?

AA members maintain a tradition of strict personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television and electronic media. However, in order to encourage active alcoholics to seek help, we often need to forfeit our own anonymity: it is the decision of the individual to do so. Everything heard within meetings or discussed on a one-to-one basis is strictly confidential and our policy is not to disclose the identity or circumstances of other members.

How can AA help me? How does it work?

AA members share their experience, strength, and hope with each other in order to solve their common problem and to help others to recover from alcoholism. The AA programme of recovery is exactly the same for every member: it rarely fails for those with a genuine desire to stop drinking.

Can AA help me control my drinking and help me drink 'normally' again?

No. AA cannot help you to control your drinking because to get sober and stay sober, alcoholics need to keep away from all alcohol at all times.

How do I join AA and what does it cost?

You become an AA member if and when *you* say so. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. AA membership costs nothing but at each meeting, groups take collections to cover meeting costs and the local and national expense of carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic. Members are free to decide their own levels of contribution.

What happens at an AA meeting?

There are several types of AA meeting at all of which you'll hear people talking about what drink did to them, what action they took to deal with their problem and how, without alcohol, they live fulfilling lives.

What will I have to do at an AA meeting?

You *have* to do nothing. Just sit, listen and learn how AA has helped others and can help you. By really listening you'll be able to consider whether or not you are an alcoholic: if you decide that you are, eventually you may wish to share your own experiences with your group and other members.

Does going to an AA meeting commit me to anything?

No. AA keeps no membership lists or attendance records and you need not disclose personal details. No one will bother you if you don't want to come back.

What happens if I meet people I know in AA?

They'll be there for the same reason as you are and will not reveal your identity or membership.

Can I get one- to-one help in AA?

You may feel uncomfortable sharing some personal problems or experiences within an AA meeting so one-to-one chats are always possible. Each newcomer is encouraged to find a 'Sponsor', a confidential mentor who she or he feels can be trusted and who will guide them through AA's programme of recovery.

Do I need to keep going to meetings after I've stopped drinking?

AA members believe there is no *cure* for alcoholism and that a return to 'normal' drinking is impossible. Staying sober depends entirely upon maintaining good spiritual, mental and physical health; this we do through regular attendance at meetings, by acting upon what we learn there and by helping others to stop drinking.

I can stay sober for weeks or months between binges. Do I still have a problem?

Many of us were able to achieve periods of sobriety in between bouts of drinking but the problem never went away. It came back bigger and stronger. Our binges lasted longer, the gaps between became shorter. The important question is, do *you* think your drinking is becoming a problem? Even if your answer is only "maybe", you probably still need help.

How will I get through Christmas, birthdays, weddings, etc., without drink?

AA members try to stay sober by not taking the first drink, one day at a time and by treating every 24 hour period in exactly the same way. Each day without alcohol adds to the strength and knowledge needed to get through difficult times.

What is a 'rock bottom'?

Rock bottom is when you become hopeless, *hope – less*, because of drink. You may or may *not* have lost your job, house and home; family and friends; social standing, self esteem and self worth. To stop drinking, you 'throw in the towel' when you reach your *spiritual* rock bottom. That's when you admit to yourself that your mind, body and spirit have at last had enough and that alcohol has beaten you.

Is AA for people of all ages?

Yes. AA is for everyone. It is never too early, never too late to change life for the better.

If I have a relapse, a 'slip', can I come back to AA?

Yes. If you still have a desire to stop drinking, you will always be welcome and "keep coming back" are words you'll hear at least once at *all* AA meetings.

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