

AA's Pledge:

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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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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- ▲ What is alcoholism?
- ▲ What is AA?
- ▲ How does AA help the alcoholic?
- ▲ What are AA meetings?
- ▲ Who belongs to AA?
- ▲ Does an alcoholic have to go “all the way down” before AA can help?
- ▲ Are there any young people in AA?
- ▲ Who runs AA?
- ▲ What does it cost to belong to AA?
- ▲ What can the families of alcoholics do?
- ▲ What AA does NOT do.
- ▲ How can you find out more about AA?
- ▲ The Twelve Steps
- ▲ The Twelve Traditions

What is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is recognised as a major health problem. In the UK it ranks alongside heart disease and cancer – and it does not damage alcoholics alone. Others are hurt by its effects – in the home, at work and on the road. Alcoholism costs the community millions of pounds every year. So whether or not you ever become an alcoholic yourself, alcoholism still can have an impact on your life.

We have learned a great deal about how to identify and arrest alcoholism. But so far no one has discovered a way to prevent it, because nobody knows exactly *why* some drinkers turn into alcoholics. Doctors and scientists in the field have not agreed on the cause (or causes) of alcoholism.

For that reason, AA concentrates on helping those who are already alcoholics, so that they can stop drinking and learn to how to live a normal, happy life without alcohol.

As AA sees it, alcoholism is an illness. Alcoholics cannot control their drinking, because they are ill in their bodies and in their minds (or emotions), AA believes. If they do not stop drinking, their alcoholism always gets worse.

Both the American Medical Association and the British Medical Association, chief organisations of doctors in those countries, also have said that alcoholism is an illness.

What are the symptoms?

Not all alcoholics have the same symptoms, but many – at different stages in the illness – show these signs:

- they find that only alcohol can make them feel self-confident and at ease with other people;
- often want “just one more” at the end of a party;
- look forward to drinking occasions and think about them a lot;
- get drunk when they had not planned to;
- try to control their drinking by changing types of drinks, going on the wagon or taking pledges;
- sneak drinks;
- lie about their drinking;
- hide bottles;
- drink at work (or in school);
- drink alone;
- have blackouts (that is, cannot remember the next day what they said or did the night before);
- drink in the morning to relieve severe hangovers, guilty feelings and fears;
- fail to eat and become malnourished;
- get cirrhosis of the liver;
- shake violently, hallucinate or have convulsions when withdrawn from alcohol.

What is AA?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who help each other to stay sober. They offer the same help to anyone who has a drinking problem and wants to do something about it. Since they are all alcoholics themselves, they have a special understanding of each other. They know what the illness feels like – and they have learned how to recover from it in AA.

AA members say that they *are* alcoholics today – even when they have not had a drink for many years. They do not say that they are “cured”. Once people have lost their ability to control their drinking, they can never again be sure of drinking safely – or, in other words, they can never become “*former* alcoholics” or “*ex* alcoholics”. But in AA, they can become sober alcoholics, *recovered* alcoholics.

How does AA help the alcoholic?

Through the example and friendship of the recovered alcoholics in AA, new members are encouraged to stay away from a drink “one day at a time”, as the AA members do. Instead of “swearing off forever” or worrying about whether they will be sober tomorrow, AA members concentrate on not drinking right now – today.

By keeping alcohol out of their systems, newcomers take care of one part of their illness – their bodies have a chance to get well. But remember, there is another part. If they are going to *stay* sober, they need healthy minds and healthy emotions, too. So they begin to straighten out their confused thinking and unhappy feelings by following AA's *suggested* “Twelve Steps” to recovery. These Steps *suggest* ideas and actions that can guide alcoholics toward happy and useful lives.

To stay in touch new members go to AA meetings regularly with other members and learn about the recovery programme.

What are AA meetings?

Alcoholics Anonymous is made up of over 100,000 local groups in 150 countries. In Great Britain and Continental European Region, there are currently about 3,500 groups. The people in each group get together, usually once or twice a week, to hold AA meetings, of two main types:

- 1) “Closed meetings” are for alcoholics only. These are group discussions, and any members who want to speak up, ask questions and share their thoughts with fellow members. At “closed meetings”, AA's can get help with personal problems in stay sober and in everyday living. Some other

- AA’s can explain how they have already handled the same problems – often by using one or more of the Twelve Steps.
- 2) At “open meetings”, speakers tell how they drank, how they discovered AA, and how its programme has helped them. Members may bring relatives or friends, and usually anyone interested in AA is also welcome to attend “open meetings”.

Who belongs to AA?

Like other illnesses, alcoholism strikes all sorts of people. So the men and women in AA are of all races and nationalities, all religions and no religion at all. They work at all occupations, as lawyers and housewives, teachers and lorry drivers, waitresses and members of the clergy.

Surveys indicate that total AA membership is estimated at over 2,200,000 worldwide.

Does an alcoholic have to go “all the way down” before AA can help?

AA was started in 1935 by a New York stockbroker and an Ohio surgeon, who had both been “hopeless” drunks. At first, most AA members also had been seriously ill: their drinking had sent them to hospitals, sanatoriums or jails. But more and more people began to hear about AA and soon many alcoholics found they did not have to let their illness do that much damage. They could recover in AA before their health had been totally wrecked and while they still had their jobs and families.

Are there any young people in AA?

In recent years, a great many young alcoholics have come into AA. The pamphlet ‘Young People and AA’ gives the personal stories of ten who joined when they were under 30 – including one who joined at 18, one at 16. Stories of some of these younger members can also be seen in the DVD “Who Me”. The young people are cheerfully staying sober and taking part in AA activities.

Who runs AA?

AA has no real government. Each group is free to work out its own customs and ways of holding meetings, as long as it does not harm other groups or AA as a whole. The members elect a chairperson, a secretary and other group officers. These officers do not give orders to anybody; mostly, their job is to see that the meetings run

smoothly. In the average group, new officers are elected once or twice a year.

But the individual group is not cut off from the rest of AA. Just as AA members help each other, so do AA groups. Here are some of the means they use to exchange help:

- 1) Groups in the same area set up an “intergroup” organisation.
- 2) Intergroups in turn belong to geographically determined Regional organisations.
- 3) Groups everywhere can share their experiences by keeping in touch with the AA General Service Office in York.
- 4) Groups in Great Britain, including Continental European Region, choose representatives to go to the AA General Service Conference, held once a year.

All these and their representatives at the Conference make *suggestions*, based on the experiences of many different AA groups. But they do not make rules or issue commands to any groups or members.

What does it cost to belong to AA?

There are no dues or fees for AA membership.

But money is needed for some purposes: renting the meeting hall, buying tea, coffee and other refreshments, buying AA books, pamphlets, and magazines. So a collection is usually taken during the meeting, and members put in whatever they can afford or wish to give. Groups also contribute money to support the General Service Office and other AA activities.

In return for the AA help that members give to other alcoholics, these members are never paid. Their reward is something much better than money – it is their own sobriety. AA members have found that helping other alcoholics is the best way to stay sober themselves.

What can the families of alcoholics do?

AA is just for the alcoholics, but two other fellowships can help their relatives or friends. One is Al-Anon Family Groups. The other is Alateen, for young people who have alcoholic parents.

What AA does NOT do?

1. AA does *not* run membership drives to try and persuade alcoholics into joining. AA is for alcoholics who *want* to get sober.
2. AA does *not* check up on its members to see that they don’t drink. It helps alcoholics to help *themselves*.

3. AA is *not* a religious organisation. All members are free to decide on their own personal ideas.
4. AA is *not* a medical organisation, does *not* give out medicines or psychiatric advice.
5. AA does *not* run any hospitals, wards or treatment centres or provide nursing services.
6. AA is *not* connected with any other organisation. But AA does co-operate with organisations that fight alcoholism. Some members work for such organisations – as individuals – *not* as representatives of AA.
7. AA does *not* accept money from sources outside AA, either private or government.
8. AA does *not* offer any social services, does *not* provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, or money. It helps alcoholics stay sober, so they earn these things for themselves.
9. Alcoholics Anonymous lives up to the “anonymous” part of its title. It does *not* want members’ names to be used on TV or radio or in newspapers. Members do not disclose other members’ names to people outside AA. Members are *not* ashamed of belonging to AA; they must want to encourage more alcoholics to come to AA for help. They do *not* want to make heroes or heroines of themselves simply for taking care of their own sobriety.
10. AA does *not* provide letters of reference to courts, social services, employers etc.

How can you find out more about AA?

1. Most towns and cities have an AA listing in the telephone book for more information about AA and local meetings.
2. If you do not find an AA listing in your phone book, phone the National Helpline number 0800 917 7650, or write to:
AA General Service Office
PO Box 1
10 Toft Green
York YO1 7NJ
3. You can get a list of AA literature by writing to the General Service Office at the above address.
4. In local libraries, you may find copies of the following AA books:
Alcoholics Anonymous
Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age
Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
As Bill Sees It
Dr Bob and the Good Oldtimers
Pass It On

5. SHARE in England and Wales, and Roundabout in Scotland, both monthly magazines, may be obtained from your local AA group or by writing for information to the General Service Office at the address shown above.

The Twelve Steps

1-We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable. 2-Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3-Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over the care of God as *we understood Him*. 4-Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. 5-Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. 6-Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 7-Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. 8-Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. 9-Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 10-Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 11- Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. 12-Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

1-Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity. 2-For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. 3-The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking. 4-Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole. 5-Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. 6-An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose. 7-Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. 8-Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers. 9-AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve. 10-Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. 11-Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films. 12-Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.