

ALL ADDICTS ANONYMOUS™

A Program of Recovery for All Addicts and All Addictions

HOW TO START A GROUP

*Questions & Answers, and
Shared Experience*

This pamphlet gives the necessary information you need to start your own AAA group including suggested meeting procedures and core introductory readings.

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HOW TO START A GROUP

“**You cannot recover alone.** It is a deadly mistake to think that you can. In our times, God has chosen to speak to addicts through brothers and sisters who are ahead of them on the road to freedom. These are the people who can show you how to recover. Find them. Learn from them. Work with them. Join their group and go to their meetings. If you cannot locate a group, do what the pioneers in this field did: dig up a couple of people who are also looking for recovery and start your own group. Go to meetings — practice the principles in all of your affairs, one day at a time — and work with others as you go. It really is that simple.”

– *How to Get Going on the AAA Way of Life*

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is designed to give the basic information necessary to start an AAA group and is set in two parts. Part 1, presented in a question-and-answer format, consists of what you need to know to start a group. Part 2 contains wisdom from three AAA members helpful to anyone who hopes to start a meeting. The appendix section offers suggested meeting procedures and core introductory readings.

PART ONE:

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following questions and answers are intended to provide the basic information you need to start your own group.

What is an AAA group?

An All Addicts Anonymous group can be defined as two or more addicts meeting together to achieve and maintain abstinence through the power of spiritual awakening.

Four other basic characteristics AAA groups share:

1. There are no dues or fees for group membership. All groups are self-supporting through voluntary contributions only.
2. Each AAA group is autonomous, conducting its internal affairs as it wishes. It is merely asked not to do anything that would harm any of its members or All Addicts Anonymous as a whole.
3. The more committed the individual group members are to living the principles of recovery — the Four Absolutes, Twelve Steps, and Ten Points — the stronger the group will be.
4. Experience has proven that group work is essential to recovery — that most of us cannot recover except as working members of an active group.

How do you become an AAA Group Member?

Group membership requires no formal application. Simply put, you are a member of AAA when you say you are, and equally, you are a member of a group when you say you are. AAA members are distinctive in their acceptance of a suggested Program of Four Absolutes, Twelve Steps, and Ten Points, which is designed for personal recovery from addiction.

What types of meetings do AAA Groups hold?

The purpose of every AAA group is the same: to achieve and maintain abstinence through the power of spiritual awakening. However, not all meetings carry this message in the same way. Generally speaking, meetings can be divided into two different categories:

+ Basic Program Meetings

Designed to help newer members gain a foothold in the AAA recovery process — while providing others with the opportunity to give back and to keep the Program alive for themselves — these meetings concentrate on the basic fundamentals of the AAA recovery Program. Meeting attendance includes men and women, addicts of all kinds, family members of addicts, those who suspect that they may be addicts, and anyone interested in the AAA way of life. These meetings are indispensable to all members, not just newcomers. They provide the setting necessary to get started on the AAA way of life and to keep it going. Basic Program Meeting formats include Beginners' Meetings, Speaker Meetings, and very often, Discussion and Literature Study Meetings.

+ Special-Focus Program Meetings

These meetings are spearheaded by dedicated group members with solid AAA recoveries and are designed to meet the ever-increasing need each member has to grow along spiritual lines. The central aim of Special-Focus Meetings is to place particular emphasis on a specific Program principle (such as an Absolute, Step, or Point) and/or concentrate on a particular addiction or hang-up (such as sex, food, or anxiety/depression).

AAA membership is always open to any and all addicts. However, participation in Special-Focus Meetings may be limited to men or women and (in exceptional cases) by invitation only. While Basic Meetings concentrate more broadly on the fundamental principles of recovery, the Special-focus Meeting digs a little deeper.

Some examples include a men's sex recovery meeting that focuses on applying the Second Absolute (purity) to the problem of sex addiction; a women's food recovery meeting that focuses on

applying the First Absolute (honesty) to the problem of food addiction; a mixed men's and women's meeting that focuses on the actual practice of Step Eleven (prayer and meditation) in a group setting; or an invitation-only meeting that focuses on Point Nine (*being willing to grow* along spiritual lines) by giving each member an opportunity to share progress or pratfalls in their personal application of Steps Ten through Twelve. The format possibilities are endless and may include special events like AAA workshops, seminars, and spiritual retreats.

Some Special-Focus Meetings have put in place a pre-screening process for prospective attendees or have conditions for attendance. These conditions are at the group level only, as AAA membership is open to all addicts. All conditions should be implemented responsibly and be stated clearly and considerately to prospective meeting attendees up front.

What kinds of AAA meeting formats are there?

AAA meetings can be experienced through face-to-face, phone, or video conferencing contact. As the ways you can participate in meetings vary, so do meeting formats. Some of the more common suggested formats are as follows:

+ Discussion Meetings

An AAA member serving as leader opens the formal part of the meeting by sharing on a specific topic which is usually decided on beforehand. After sharing on this topic for a few minutes, the leader opens the meeting for further discussion.

Some groups cover topics on a rotating schedule, while others leave it to the discretion of the leader. A few specific topic suggestions would include one or more of the Four Absolutes, Twelve Steps, and Ten Points; one of the non-step principles such as "one day at a time," "first things first," and "let go and let God"; one of the big recovery-killers such as resentment, fear, or self-will; or one of the major sanity producers such as having a right relationship with sex, money, diet, work, or exercise.

+ Speaker Meetings

One or more members selected beforehand give their recovery stories, telling what they were like, what happened, and what they are like now. In AAA, the central focus of every recovery story is the message of spiritual awakening. This message can only occur — as the Twelfth Step makes clear — as the result of the Steps. This is why most groups prefer that members who share their stories have both a firm commitment to the AAA principles of recovery and first-hand working experience with each of the Twelve Steps. It is also suggested that speakers should have a minimum period of ninety days of continuous abstinence from their primary addiction.

+ Beginners' Meetings

This meeting format is designed to help newer and/or struggling members seek solutions through group experience. A leader and a panel of two or three seasoned members respond to questions from addicts who are new in the Program. During the formal part of the meeting, members are welcome to ask Program questions or request experience in applying the AAA principles to a current life need. After the panel gives their experience, other members are free to participate. It's important to remember that the Beginners' Meeting is not an extended therapy or advice session. Group discussion should always be centered on Program solutions.

The Beginners' Meeting format works best with a healthy ratio of newer members to those with a working experience of the AAA way of life. While the responsibility of the more seasoned members is to help keep the meeting solution-oriented, newer members are encouraged to get sponsors and begin their recovery journeys. If the Program question-and-experience period ends early, the balance of the meeting usually defaults to the Discussion Meeting format.

+ Literature Study Meetings

This meeting format dedicates the formal part of the meeting to studying and discussing recovery-related literature. Groups are encouraged to exercise responsibility when selecting books and other materials for study — choosing literature that best reflects

the principles embodied in the AAA Program of recovery. To make this process easier, groups can visit www.alladdictsanonymous.org/readings for suggested readings.

Also, groups will never go wrong studying such recovery classics as *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the AA Big Book) — a textbook for working the Steps, or *Twelve Steps* and *Twelve Traditions* and *How to Get Going on the AAA Way of Life*, both commentaries on AA and AAA, respectively.

The Literature Study Meeting format functions best in smaller groups. When groups become too large, they often break into two or more smaller groups. This gives more members a chance to participate in the reading and sharing portion of the meeting.

What is the AAA home group?

Most AAA members find it essential to belong to one group that they call their “home group.” This is the group where members attend meetings most frequently, where they accept responsibilities, sustain working Program friendships, and very often, find a sponsor — that is, an experienced Program friend who can give them practical guidance in working with the Four Absolutes, Twelve Steps, and Ten Points.

Note: It is an unspoken tradition that members pray for their home group. A quick prayer said regularly for the group to receive guidance and protection and to be of maximum service to others is a powerful way to personally establish God as the ultimate authority of one’s home group. It is also essential to pray for the group’s struggling members (by name), asking that they receive the help they need.

How does AAA relate to members from other Anonymous Fellowships?

The following answer is adapted from the book *How to Get Going on the AAA Way of Life*:

“All Addicts Anonymous offers its Program, its friendship, and its active help to any and all addicts everywhere, no matter their

'status' in recovery or affiliation with other fellowships. AAA welcomes all working members of any of the Anonymous Fellowships — that is, all persons who have admitted to being addicts and have adopted all or part of the AAA way of life.

For those new to recovery, it may be necessary to consider the Fellowship of AAA as a secondary, supportive Fellowship while joining and serving the fellowship of your primary addiction first. Many AAA members owe their beginning to other Fellowships.

Addicts in other Fellowships who need help with multiple addictions, with the mental and spiritual aspects behind their addiction, with addictive character defects, or with practicing the principles in all their affairs often find what they are looking for in All Addicts Anonymous.”

How are AAA meetings run?

How meetings are run is entirely up to the discretion of the group. Typically, the leader opens the meeting with a few words of welcome and reads “Brief Facts about All Addicts Anonymous” and other core readings on the AAA Program.

After these introductory readings, meeting participants introduce themselves, offering a special welcome to any new members in attendance. At some point in the meeting, groups usually “pass the hat,” taking up a collection to cover expenses, and making time for brief announcements. Customarily, at the close of the meeting, the leader ends with the Lord’s Prayer. (For an example of a suggested meeting procedure, see page 24.)

+ Self-Support (Seventh Tradition)

There are no dues or fees for membership in AAA, but we do have expenses, so groups generally “pass the hat” in order to cover expenses like rent, literature, and refreshments. Members are free to contribute whatever they wish. If groups have money left over after paying their expenses and would like to make a donation to All Addicts Anonymous International, they can do so at www.alladdictsanonymous.org.

What is a Group Business Meeting?

The Fellowship of All Addicts Anonymous consists of many autonomous individual groups, each of which is responsible for conducting its own affairs in adherence to the AAA Principles of recovery and the Twelve Traditions of AA. Since each group is self-governing, many of them schedule special get-togethers, apart from regular recovery meetings, to discuss group business. Some groups hold these meetings at a regular interval, while others call them on an as-needed basis. All group members are welcome to attend these meetings and are encouraged to raise questions and to participate in the business at hand. Some of the items discussed in a Business Meeting are as follows:

- Is the group carrying the AAA Program to others effectively?
- Are new members and other participants properly welcomed?
- Is the meeting format still appropriate for the current direction and size of the group?
- Are the rent and other expenses being paid on time?
- Is the meeting facility being properly cared for and maintained by the group?
- Is the group in good standing with the facility in which the meeting is held?
- Are the group's funds being used prudently?
- Are the pass-the-hat funds meeting the required needs of the group?
- Is there a need for additional literature or supplies?
- Are there group and/or meeting service positions that need to be filled?
- Are there any reports from group officers?

What are the Group Service Positions?

The following group service positions are held by most groups in order to better conduct their service activities.

+ Chairperson

The chairperson serves for a specified period of time — usually six months or a year. Experience suggests that those who serve in this position should have a solid and consistent recovery, and ideally, they have held other group offices first.

The chairperson oversees basic group responsibilities such as hospitality, literature, special events, and other vital functions, in coordination with other officers and group members. The chairperson is often responsible for opening and closing the meeting room.

+ Secretary

The secretary, like the chairperson, should be an experienced, responsible group member. For groups that have no chairperson, they may perform the tasks associated with that position. The secretary is generally expected to keep and maintain a list of group members' contact information in order to coordinate calls for Twelfth-Step help, select meeting leaders or speakers, organize group business meetings, and communicate pertinent details about AAA activities and events to group members.

+ Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for collecting Seventh Tradition funds, paying expenses (such as rent, literature, and refreshments), keeping clean financial records, and providing financial reports to the group. Treasurers usually maintain their group's financial records in a simple ledger book or its digital equivalent.

What Are the Meeting Service Positions?

The following service positions may be utilized, where applicable, at the meeting service level.

+ Meeting Leader

The leader shares in the overall running of the meeting in cooperation with other volunteers and participants. Their main task is to help the group properly adhere to the meeting format and procedures and to handle the occasional curveball likely to occur amongst a group of addicts. Larger and more formal meetings often rotate this position on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, while smaller, less-formal groups tend to serve for longer periods. The leader service position gives slightly more experienced members a chance to give back at the group level and is an important part of practicing Step Twelve.

+ Hospitality

The hospitality position may be held by one or more persons for the sole purpose of making members feel welcome to the meeting. Responsibilities include such tasks as preparing refreshments, setting up and cleaning up, displaying literature, and most importantly, greeting new members.

+ Timekeeper

The time-keeping task is performed by an individual volunteer who keeps time — announcing when shares should wrap up. This position helps larger and/or more formal meetings to stay focused and on time and gives more members a chance to participate. The length of shares depends upon group preference and is often dictated by how many members are present.

+ Dictionary Service Position

The dictionary service position may be utilized by groups that run Literature Study Meetings. The main purpose of this service is to help meeting participants better understand the materials being studied by the group. During the literature study part of the meeting, if a word is read that a member would like further clarification on, they may raise their hand and ask for a definition. Although the general flow of the reading portion of the meeting is often interrupted by this process, many groups feel the benefits far outweigh the sacrifice.

+ Phone/Video Service Positions

The purpose of group service positions such as chairperson, secretary, and treasurer are the same regardless if meetings are experienced in-person, over the phone, or virtual. However, the Phone/Video platform requires many online capabilities for carrying out basic group functions not typically available in face-to-face meetings. For example, the chairperson and/or secretary often stays in regular touch with the group through email or text, sending such information as meeting links, readings, announcements, group contact list for Twelfth Step help, signup form for meeting service positions, and other pertinent information. Likewise, the treasurer often sets up and maintains an online resource for Seventh Tradition donations.

The only service positions particular to Phone/Video Meetings are that of host and co-host (if applicable). These positions operate the meeting's online dashboard in order to handle such responsibilities as muting background disturbances, anonymizing participants' names or phone numbers, posting readings through the screen sharing tool, muting or removing disruptive participants, and other basic dashboard functions. If possible, the host position responsibilities should be separate from the meeting leader's, for it is often cumbersome to attempt both simultaneously.

PART TWO: **SHARED EXPERIENCE**

“ To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a Fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends — this is an experience you must not miss.” — *AA Big Book*

A Group is a Gift from GOD – By Matt D.

A longtime AAA member emphasizes the need to place all efforts at starting a group in the capable hands of God.

Twenty-two years ago, I began the process of having my life and sanity restored through the principles and practices of the All Addicts Anonymous Program. I do not have the time here to communicate exactly how difficult and yet how shot-through with joy this process has been. But this I can say with complete certainty: the AAA Program, without a doubt, is the single greatest gift of my life.

And so you can see why hanging on to this precious treasure over the past twenty-two years has been the most important work of my life.

It has not been easy. This is to be expected. And perhaps it would be near impossible if it weren't for the help of a simple spiritual action: helping others.

It is no wonder that the AA Big Book lays such heavy emphasis on service work, even going so far as to say it will work when all other activities fail. Don't get me wrong — I am not suggesting a program solely consisting of helping others. Twelfth-Step work is part of an overall equation that equals recovery. But it is a major part of the answer because, as it says in the book *How to Get Going*, "The only way you can keep the treasure of recovery is to spend your life giving it away."

A few years into my recovery, I got an opportunity to really step it up in the "giving it away" department. My AAA home group elected me to serve as group chairperson. (I don't exactly recall them giving me a choice in the matter, but I was happy to serve those who had helped me so much nonetheless.) Until then, I had little knowledge of what went into this service position. I had definitely been underestimating the work and commitment involved. It kept me as busy as the devil. You see, my home group was a beehive of twelve-step activity at that time, running several meetings per week. I was often responsible for choosing and finding speakers, selecting meeting topics, providing literature, connecting newcomers with sponsors, and I even helped make breakfast for our Sunday brunch meeting.

One of the results of this work was that I had less time and interest in other less-important things. Occasionally, I'd get full of myself, start neglecting some other essential responsibilities, or cop a resentment with one or more of the group members, but by working with my sponsor and other members of the group and by following their Program suggestions, I got the help I needed to deal with these imbalances. Ironically, many of my faults — which came to the surface during interactions with group members — were later worked out in the group itself.

To my dismay, after several years, I found myself in the position of having to move away from my home group. The area I relocated to was not really conducive to the level of group work I had once enjoyed. How was I going to get along without my previous connection to AAA friends and sponsors? How can I keep the Twelfth Step — something I found so essential to my sanity and joy-level and recovery — alive?

For the first few months, I did the best I could with other groups and tried to serve where I was able, but I deeply missed the connection and commitment to God I had found in my old AAA home group.

At that time, a friend of mine recommended we start an AAA phone meeting together. I wasn't really sure. Frankly, I had prejudged the idea as being woefully inadequate in comparison to basic face-to-face meetings, never mind measuring up to my old home group standards. But what had we to lose?

Like many things in life, as it turns out, my preconceived judgments were quite wrong.

What originally began as an hour-a-week impersonal phone meeting has turned into a humble little group of addicts helping each other on a regular basis. Coming this September, our group — now numbering close to thirty members — celebrates six years. As our group has grown, so have its members, including myself. During this time, I have weathered some of the roughest storms of my life. I never would have made it through alone. Obviously, God was always there whether I was aware of his presence or not, but I can't say enough of what it has meant to my sanity to be part of a community of addicts who are also committed to the AAA principles of recovery and (thank God!) are willing to share their experience, strength, and hope with me.

Being part of such a group takes effort. Like my own recovery, it has required patience and openness to the miraculous hand of God. But if our own personal recoveries have taught us anything, it is that God can do for us what we can never do for ourselves.

In closing, and in an effort to sum up what I really hope to get across on how to start a successful AAA group, I offer the wisdom of an AAA member and friend who was responsible for starting several meetings himself — many of which offered me hope in my early recovery:

The formation of a successful group is a work of God. We can do all the right things, say all the right things, and be in the right places, but unless we surrender the work to God, a truly successful group will not be formed. The group is not ours — that is, we cannot claim personal success if a group forms, as we are instruments in the hands of God in reaching out to those who are striving for a way out of their addictive trouble in life.

First, last, and always, we must be firm in our principles. The Four Absolutes, the Twelve Steps, and the Ten Points are the principles we stand by, no matter what anybody else says. Even though we stress the loving attitude we need when sharing our experience with others, we must remain firm in these basics — no matter who or how many seem to say otherwise. Only by standing fast on the Absolutes, the Steps, and the Points can we assure that our group will stay the course, remaining true to the mission of our Fellowship and staying spiritually alive and healthy.

I couldn't have said it better myself!

Our Humble Little Group – By Bill M.

This seasoned AAA group leader shares how the kinship of common suffering and a commitment to go to any lengths to recover are the prerequisite of every successful group.

Before I tell my story of being introduced to All Addicts Anonymous and the joy of starting an AAA group, I'd like to give some of my recovery story.

In AAA, the definition of recovery is summed up in a simple formula: abstinence + spiritual awakening = recovery. If you were to sum up my first fifteen years in AA in a similar way, it would be this: abstinence - spiritual awakening = mental breakdown. For me, merely “not drinking and going to meetings” offered no immunity against panic attacks, severe depression, and claustrophobia. It certainly didn’t offer protection against the thoughts of suicide — quite the contrary. When things looked most bleak, suicide appeared to be my only option.

In the height of my desperation, and with what little sanity I had left, I turned to a man in AA and asked him what he thought was wrong with me. “You’re suffering from untreated alcoholism,” he said. “Get on your knees. We’re going to pray.” On the following day, he took me to my first Big Book Step Study Meeting, where I heard a language I had never heard before — the language of honesty mixed with recovery. These people had something I didn’t have and desperately wanted, and some of them were sober only a year or two. The following week I started working on my inventory, and *that’s when my recovery began.*

It was four years later when I made my initial contact with AAA and the Upstate Group. At that time, the Upstate Group was the home group of the AAA movement. As I mentioned, I had already been through the Big Book Step Study process, and it was through this process that I had a spiritual experience. But more than this, it gave me the honesty and sanity to admit to myself I had a problem with sex precisely at the stage when many AAs hide behind their “sobriety” and become complacent.

I won’t go into too many details here except to say that, after coming to AAA, I found what I was looking for: the spiritual tools I needed to achieve freedom from the sex addiction that haunted my serenity and peace of mind and threatened my business. This freedom, of course, is no small thing. It is by far one of the greatest gifts of my life. And as with all gifts of this magnitude, it comes with both the joy and responsibility of sharing it with others. “To whom much is given, much is expected.”

So, after finding my footing in AAA — starting with the application of the Program applied to the problem of sex — I became active in helping others who were also hung up in this insidious addiction. After doing a little poking around, I discovered four of my friends in recovery who were trapped in addictive sexual behavior too. We began making regular visits to the Upstate Group and working together to achieve sexual sanity.

It wasn't long before our little group of four decided to start an AAA meeting of our own. Our first attempt was a Step Study meeting. We did our best to keep it going, but after six months, it folded. (Consequently, several years later, we were successful in starting and keeping this type of meeting going.) Although at the time we no longer had our meeting, we did have each other and the principles we needed to keep going on the AAA way of life. Having a group — and particularly one with a good foothold on the Program — is always an advantage in starting a successful meeting. A good meeting almost always proceeds from a good group and not the other way around.

There's no need to second-guess why our first go at a meeting was a "no-take." Perhaps God had something else in mind for us, something a little more specific to our current spiritual need. Occasionally, we'd get together and talk about starting another meeting and what we might do differently. I remember one of these times distinctly when one of us said, "Well, we're all struggling in the sex department; let's start a meeting where we focus on that." Since we all agreed, that's what we did. We started with just the four of us and the need for sexual sobriety.

The primary commitment of our new meeting became living the Four Absolutes and practicing Steps Ten and Eleven on a daily basis. The result was that most of us started to get sexually sober.

By Christmas of that year, another friend in AA showed up looking for help. Like myself, he was alcohol sober for many years, sponsoring people, going around telling his story, but at home, his marriage was falling apart because of the prostitutes and the pornography. He brought with him the first member of our group

who did not qualify as an AA, whose primary addiction was sex, and who hadn't been through the Steps like the rest of us. (Consequently, we made it a part of our group commitment that everyone who joins should be taken through the Steps as laid out in the AA Big Book.)

Following our two newest members came three or four young guys who had just graduated high school and were also looking for sanity in the sex department. That was a big turning point for our group when we saw these younger members trying to apply the principle of Absolute Purity to their lives.

When in recovery circles, we'd try to tactfully let others know about our meeting by simply calling it a men's meeting that focuses on the third part of the Fourth Step (from the AA Big Book — sexual misconduct). When I'd tell my recovery story in other groups, I'd mention the importance of sexual sobriety and that I'd be happy to talk to anyone interested after the meeting. The other guys started doing the same thing. What we all found was that the one-on-one approach of carrying the message directly to our sponsees and friends was much more effective than the less-intimate broadcast method.

Recovery is not haphazard; it requires intentional work and commitment. There's no room for kicking tires in this thing. This is why our group asks that all members go through the Big Book Step Study process, if they haven't already, upon entering. Going through the Steps is a prerequisite first move toward the type of recovery AAA is shooting for. If you don't go through the Steps, you'll never have the fundamental change that makes sobriety possible. Along with these commitments, our group is now — and has been from the beginning — dedicated to the daily practice of living the Four Absolutes.

The fundamental quality of a successful group is commitment. I highly recommend starting a group with one or more persons committed to the AAA way of life and willing, come hell or high water, to attend each week for the first six months or so. God rewards us handsomely for our efforts, but sometimes I think it nec-

essary to prove it to him by the work we do. It is the effort and work and sweat that gets his attention and elicits his help. His help is the thing we need more than anything else, for no other Power can set us free from all of the selfishness, lies, sickness, and addiction.

This August, our AAA group turns eleven years old. From the original core group of four members, three of us have stuck with it and now have several years of sexual sobriety. Our membership usually hovers around ten men. A majority of the group is free from compulsive sex and is enjoying a sanity and joy that they never believed possible. God's miraculous power to relieve human suffering and heal the sickness of addiction is undeniably apparent to me now. I see it each week at our humble little Wednesday night meeting in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Thank you, God!

"I Plan, GOD Laughs" – By Antonia D.

A prospective AAA group leader gives her witness on the importance of planning and the need for patience in starting a group.

When I was asked to give this witness, I was in the final stages of organizing my first AAA meeting. The idea was to give the perspective of someone new to starting an AAA group. I had everything planned — the people, the location, the introduction and readings, the literature, and more. Well, as the saying goes, "I plan, God laughs," because there was one major detail I hadn't planned: I did not plan on a global pandemic that would alter everyday human life, making an in-person meeting impossible for the foreseeable future.

As it turns out, God has an uncanny knack for using calamity for good. While I've been waiting for the green light to start organizing an in-person meeting again, several great things have happened. Firstly, I've grown infinitely closer to my original AAA online home group, a group that now includes many solid members and recovery friends also restricted from attending their face-to-face AAA meetings. Secondly, but first in order of importance, I've grown infinitely closer to the AAA Program.

The All Addicts Anonymous Program is a refuge for me, a port in the storm, a place where I can peacefully rest in the arms of God, facing the wreckage of my past while standing tall in the face of life's daily trials. The past ten months have not been easy for me. To be a single mother of two is a challenge in itself, but when you add the anxieties and uncertainties of a pandemic, the isolation from friends and family, the responsibilities of homeschooling your children, and working a second job, I could not have done it, and cannot continue to do it, without the help of the AAA Program and Fellowship.

AAA has done so much to change my life that I feel a spiritual obligation and responsibility to share it with others. And with its all-inclusive message, I can offer it to just about anyone who may be open to its help — everyone from my teenage daughter to the ladies in the local rehab. My motives for starting a meeting are clear. I want to be of service and to help other people get going on the AAA Program too. Fortunately, starting a meeting is not the only way to give back. Acting as secretary, leading meetings, sharing experience, volunteering to read, throwing a few bucks in the hat, and being available to sponsor other women are just some of the ways I can say “thank you” and ensure the AAA message will be there for others.

At the risk of jumping around, I'd like to tell you how I came to AAA and a little bit of my story. Like many of us, I got my recovery start in Alcoholics Anonymous. It was there I was taught to regard service as a key to meaningful and long-term sobriety. I started with unlocking the meeting room, making coffee, answering calls for the hotline, and then eventually serving on several AA committees. It was as a member of the Archive Committee for my local AA District when I first heard of All Addicts Anonymous. I was at the University of Illinois going through the papers of Dr. O. Hobart Mowrer — professor of psychiatry, author, and an instrumental key player in establishing AA in my area — when I stumbled on a series of letters between him and early AA member and cofounder of AAA, Tom Powers.

Besides Tom's involvement in helping to write and edit *Twelve Steps* and *Twelve Traditions*, I knew very little of him. I had heard some rumors that Tom's relationship with AA and Bill Wilson (AA's cofounder) was contentious, but this was quickly dispelled when I read his correspondence with Dr. Mowrer. Tom's love for AA and Bill Wilson were crystal clear on every page. I was absolutely impressed by the strength and clarity of Tom's defense for the role of God in AA, a clear rebuke to the growing secularization of the Twelve-step Movement. After reading these letters, I had to know more.

After finding some information on Tom Powers online, I made a connection with All Addicts Anonymous and started attending the phone and online meetings. At my very first meeting, I was immediately struck by the seriousness of the members in their search to know God. It was unapologetic, sincere, and frankly a breath of fresh air. The topic for discussion in that meeting was the prayer method outlined in the spiritual classic *The Practice of the Presence of God*, a book revered and studied in early AA. Spiritual study is big in AAA. Most members include it as a one-third part of their morning Eleventh Step routine, dedicating the other periods to seated prayer and/or meditation and praying while exercising. I started using this practice (known in AAA as the 20/20/20 prayer method) as well as repetitive prayer early on with wonderful, life-changing results.

The next couple of meetings I attended were as impactful as the first. We read the recovery stories of two women both suffering from mental addictions, one to suicidal depression and the other to severe anxiety. Both of these women, I was told, had gone on to live long, joy-filled lives free of medical and psychiatric constraints. Their message of hope came to me at a time when I was being "managed" on seven different psychiatric drugs for hang-ups very similar to theirs.

Today, for the first time in many long years, I too am free of these chemical crutches. Stop — take a look at that last sentence. This is a startling statement considering I was told I could never live sanely without relying on the use of psychiatric drugs every day

of my life. If AAA had done nothing more than give me the hope to hang together during the excruciating period of psychiatric withdrawal (worse than alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes combined), I would be eternally grateful. But it has done something of much greater importance: It has infused in me the truth that if I compartmentalize my recovery, then I'm postponing the inevitable—*the need to give myself to God 100%*.

In most other Twelve-Step Fellowships, “mental illness” is considered an outside issue; members are suggested to seek professional help outside of the fellowship. *There may be help* outside of the fellowship — I could not have safely detoxed without the help of my doctor — but in AAA, I learned that *there is never help outside of God*. Remember, the entire Twelve-Step Movement was founded when a doctor specializing in addiction (Dr. Silkworth) was willing to question the authority of his own profession's effectiveness in treating alcoholism and went on to authenticate the spiritual experience of one of his patients (Bill Wilson). It was the good doctor's confidence in the realm of spiritual experience — not in science, medicine, or therapy — that gave Bill the initial hope and trust to seek out a God-centered Program of action as a valid and efficacious answer for addiction. Nowhere else have I found a better representation of this original Program than in All Addicts Anonymous.

Of course, this isn't an exposition on the history or comparison of the recovery movements. It is a witness to help others do what I very much hope to do myself — start an AAA group. So I'd like to close with something that I hope you may find helpful in doing just that.

Once you begin the process of founding a group, you will find that you never lack the opportunity to practice patience. Patience is perhaps one of the most important assets you can have while doing this work. It was this virtue that allowed Bill Wilson to continue to carry the message of recovery for over six months to sobriety-rejecting drunks all over the land before he finally met Dr. Bob Smith, and together they became the first-ever recovery group.

In your group-starting efforts, try to remember this: it is a basic axiom that anytime any of us get involved in something with a spiritual purpose, there will be obstacles; anytime we rub shoulders with other addicts, there will be egos and personality conflicts; anytime we begin to help people, there will be old character defects inside ourselves like selfishness, self-will, and resentment. All of these things will require patience — patience with ourselves, patience with others, and patience with God. But if we hang together, work through these difficulties, and practice the Four Absolutes, Twelve Steps, and Ten Points while placing all the results in God’s hands, we are promised a joy and experience that none of us will want to miss.

APPENDIX A *Suggested Meeting Procedures*

1. MEETING INTRO: “Hello, my name is _____, and I’m a recovered addict. I’d like to welcome you to the All Addicts Anonymous _____ Meeting.”

2. PRELIMINARY READINGS (See Appendix B): Leader reads Brief Facts About All Addicts Anonymous and asks for volunteers to read (1) The Four Absolutes, (2) The Twelve Steps, and (3) The Ten Points.

NOTE: Some groups shorten these suggested preliminary readings by not including the commentary that precedes the Absolutes, Steps, and Points.

3. INTRODUCTIONS: Leader gives meeting participants an opportunity to introduce themselves to the group.

4. FORMAL PART OF THE MEETING: Leader begins the formal part of the meeting — introducing the topic, speaker, or literature.

5. SHARING PART OF THE MEETING: If applicable, the leader opens the meeting for sharing, calling on as many people as time

allows. Many groups utilize the timekeeper position to help with the general flow of the meeting.

6. PASS THE HAT & ANNOUNCEMENTS: “There are no dues or fees in AAA, but we are self-supporting through our members’ contributions.” Typically, during the Seventh Tradition collection, the leader invites donations to cover the meeting’s expenses and opens the floor for announcements.

7. CLOSING THE MEETING: Leader closes the meeting by thanking participants and volunteers, welcomes new members to return, and asks for someone to say the Lord’s Prayer.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever
and ever. Amen.

APPENDIX B
Preliminary Readings

+ BRIEF FACTS ABOUT ALL ADDICTS ANONYMOUS

All Addicts Anonymous is a non-professional, self-supporting, God-centered, and truth-centered fellowship that has found a way to extend the original Program of Alcoholics Anonymous effectively to any and all addicts.

We welcome all working members of any of the Anonymous Fellowships — that is, all persons who have admitted to being addicts and have adopted all or part of the AAA way of life.

In AAA, we understand the spiritual disease of addiction as a moving target — that applying the principles of recovery to our

primary addiction alone is hardly more than a beginning. Our experience proves that the same healing power necessary to achieve freedom from our primary addiction can be applied and extended to other areas of our lives — and more particularly, to the underlying character defects that flourish under the cover of our primary addiction.

The All Addicts Anonymous Program is a thoroughly tested and proven answer to addiction, but its healing power extends far beyond that sphere. AAA experience proves that any addict, with any and all combinations of addictions, can attain spiritual awakening, self-control, sanity, peace, and joy if he or she will go to sufficient lengths in adopting the Four Absolutes, the Twelve Steps, and the Ten Points as a way of life.

+ THE FOUR ABSOLUTES

The Four Absolutes are the time-tested moral and ethical code of the All Addicts Anonymous Program. Used in the Oxford Group and in the pioneering years of Alcoholics Anonymous, these life-saving principles, in one form or another, have actually been the foundation of the moral and spiritual life of humankind in all ages and in all civilizations. The Absolutes give you the wisdom, the spiritual know-how, and skill to live and work, to relate sanely and joyfully to people, to other creatures, and to God. They can teach you to recognize and obey that which is real and right and good and true above and beyond the sick and insufficient wants and dreams compatible with addictive living. The Absolutes, of course, are not claims of attainment. They are *aims* for daily conduct. When they are maintained faithfully as *goals*, they become powerful transformers of conduct, character, and consciousness.

- 1. Absolute honesty** — non-lying to oneself or others; unbending faithfulness to the truth in thought, word, and action.
- 2. Absolute purity** — purity of mind, purity of body, purity of the emotions, purity of heart, sexual purity.
- 3. Absolute unselfishness** — seeking what is right and true in every situation, above what I want.
- 4. Absolute love** — loving God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

+ THE TWELVE STEPS

The Twelve Steps are a unique phenomenon in our age — a set of spiritual action directions, things to do for the actual attainment of spiritual awakening, a way that leads to conscious contact with God. Their peculiar genius is that they do not require special skill or learning; they work for people in all degrees of mental, emotional, and spiritual disability. If an addict who is sincerely seeking a way out had no other tool than a working knowledge of the Steps, he or she would have a very good chance of recovery. Do not let the simple language in which they are stated fool you. They are a spiritual powerhouse to which millions of addicts now walking the streets as free men and women owe their lives and their liberty.

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions, 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 to 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 other addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

+ THE TEN POINTS

The Ten Points represent the spiritual inspiration and guidance for how to work the Twelve Steps as given by the first one hundred AA members. These original commitments are the spiritual legacy and heritage of the first men and women whose sacrifice, wisdom, and trial-and-error experience became solidified in the “How it Works” chapter of the AA Big Book. For many addicts, lesser commitments to the Program do not offer the crucial momentum necessary to reach the level of spiritual awakening required to attain true freedom. Make no mistake about it, every person who adopts the rigor and intensity of the Ten Points will be rocketed into a new dimension of existence.

We commit ourselves to work toward recovery and spiritual awakening through sincerely and responsibly trying to do what the AA Big Book suggests by:

1. *Completely giving ourselves* to this simple Program;
2. Practicing *rigorous honesty*;
3. Being *willing to go to any lengths* to recover;
4. Realizing that there is no *easier, softer way*;
5. Being *fearless and thorough* in our practice of the principles;
6. *Letting go of our old ideas absolutely*;
7. Recognizing that *half measures will not work*;
8. Asking God’s *protection and care* with complete abandon;
9. Being *willing to grow* along spiritual lines;
10. Accepting the following pertinent ideas as proved by All Addicts Anonymous experience:
 - (a) that *you cannot manage your own life*;
 - (b) that probably *no human power can restore you to sanity*;
 - (c) that God *can and will* if sought.

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**ALL ADDICTS ANONYMOUS
INTERNATIONAL, INC.**

The service arm of the AAA Fellowship offering a
Program of recovery for all addicts and all addictions.