

New to Twelve-Step Programs?

If you are new to Twelve-Step programs, you may find the ideas you hear about in meetings and see in our publications a bit daunting and perhaps unattainable. Most of the rest of us felt the same way! Here are some ideas that helped us “keep coming back” and overcome some initial barriers to recovery:

- Recovery means attaining the freedom to do whatever we think is the most meaningful to each of us individually, unencumbered by self-limiting old patterns of thought and behavior.
- Recovery means developing a calm, open and honest outlook on life, one that enables us to see different options, and choose paths that help us grow stronger and more resilient.
- Recovery from an eating disorder means freeing ourselves from rigidity about food and exercise. We find that rigidity is the hallmark of an eating disorder. The Twelve Steps enable us to find a way of relating to the world that provide the peace and power to live without fear and rigidity.
- You may hear that “an eating disorder is a spiritual malady that demands a spiritual solution.” Although many find peace and power through reliance on their own conception of a Higher Power, atheists can and do recover in EDA. “God” in EDA literature can mean the Deity, a deity, a spiritual entity of one’s own understanding (a Higher Power), or a non-spiritual conception (a higher purpose). Reliance on any one of these conceptions confers a perspective that transcends our immediate physical, social and emotional circumstances and allows us to “keep calm and carry on” with what really matters.
- Most of us started EDA with either no real belief in God, or with ideas about God that were not working for us. We discovered that it was not too hard to find ideas that *did* work. We need not adopt anyone else’s ideas about spirituality, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose to build a strong and durable recovery: we are free to use our own conception. Working the Steps requires that we consciously choose a concept greater than ourselves, that we can rely upon as a foundation around which to organize our thinking and behavior. “Working the program” means learning to understand what having an eating disorder delivers – often a much-needed sense of safety, satisfaction, peace, power or catharsis – and learning to find other ways to get these needs met. We learn to rely on the new foundation we build for ourselves through working the Steps to provide the formerly missing balance and perspective. Working the Steps set us free.
- Most of us really struggled with the idea of “powerlessness.” Here is one way to think about it: If your car gets stuck in sand or snow, it is not without power, and you are not without power, but your power and your car’s power are demonstrably insufficient to break free of the trap. If you are really stuck, no matter how much power you have, you are going to need help (people, resources, or both) to get out of whatever jam you are in. Recovery is just like that. You have to admit you are stuck before you can reach out and make use of the resources at your disposal. We when we were ready to admit we were stuck, we began to recover.
- Once we stopped fighting our eating disorders, we were able to apply the power of reason to understand the role they played for us. If we were sick and tired of doing the same things over and over, expecting different results, we began to learn new tools. We started to practice techniques that worked for others.
- Most of us started working the Steps with no real confidence they would work for us. Most of us needed to find a sponsor or recovered EDA member who could help us work through the Steps. We learned we needed to be honest about our thoughts and feelings. We then found -- usually much to our surprise -- that what worked for others also worked for us.
- In EDA, we focus on balance and perspective instead of “abstinence” from anything. Recovery from an eating disorder, however, is as durable and strong as recovery in any other Twelve Step program. We can go anywhere, and do anything, without a return of eating disordered behaviors, provided we continue to live according to the principles and practices we learn through working the Steps.
- EDA recognizes that there are many paths to recovery. EDA encourages everyone to “take what you can use and leave the rest.”

Sponsorship in EDA

Sponsorship is a fundamental and vital component of Step Twelve: it is carrying the message of recovery in the most immediate, direct and meaningful way possible.

If we have been patient and persistent in working all Twelve Steps, we will have experienced a transformation that enables us to live at peace with ourselves and the world around us. We happily share our experience, strength, and hope with those who suffer with eating disorders as we once did, glad that even our worst experiences can now serve some good purpose. Carrying the message of recovery reinforces gratitude, solidifies new habits of thought and action, and fills us with purpose and joy.

A sponsor's experience, strength and hope can provide the insight and inspiration needed to successfully work a Twelve Step program of recovery.

In EDA, a sponsor:

- Takes others through the process of working the Twelve Steps
- Listens
- Shares their personal experience, strength and hope
- Provides honest, positive feedback
- Avoids offering unsolicited advice on matters unrelated to working the program

If you have worked the Twelve Steps of EDA and have found a significant measure of peace and freedom with yourself, with food, with your body, and with others, your recovery will flourish as you help others grapple with their impediments. We encourage you to take on the service of sponsoring others as they start to work the Steps.

Specific suggestions for how to guide someone through the Steps of EDA are provided in the EDA Big Book chapter "Working with Others." The people who answer email at

sponsors@eatingdisordersanonymous.org can help with sponsorship questions that may arise.

In EDA, a sponsee:

- Commits to working the Steps
- Maintains regular, frequent contact with a Sponsor
- Is open to honest, positive feedback
- Asks for guidance
- Takes responsibility for their own decisions and actions

Although sponsees often develop strong and durable bonds with their sponsors, the relationship does not always extend beyond the context of working the Steps. Each sponsee should work to build his or her own network of friends in recovery. We encourage everyone who has made it through Step Three to consciously practice reliance on their Higher Power or higher purpose, rather than depending too heavily on individual people to see them through life challenges. Each sponsee is responsible for his or her own recovery. Switching sponsors is allowed, however, it is important to accept and work with what life presents to us as best we can, searching for positives. We learn to take what we can use and leave the rest.

A sponsor-sponsee relationship is no substitute for professional therapy. We encourage everyone to work with qualified, trained counselors and other experienced medical professionals as needed.

The best way to find a sponsor is to ask people at EDA meetings whose recovery you respect to sponsor you.

We hope everyone in EDA will find a sponsor at a face-to-face EDA meeting to help them work the Steps to recovery. If you want to work the Steps of EDA but are not situated where face-to-face meetings are held, we hope you will join our EDA phone, Zoom, and online meetings.

The EDA website (www.4EDA.org) contains a wealth of information about meetings, workshops, and literature. We encourage sponsors and sponsees to leverage EDA Step Workshop materials (including worksheets) located on the [Audios](#) tab of our website. Why wait? Please help yourself to these resources while you search for a sponsor.

You can begin your journey in recovery at any time.

New to Twelve-Step Programs and Sponsorship in EDA?



For more information please visit our website at:

www.4EDA.org

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