Greater Seattle Intergroup
Newcomer Packet

Five Helpful Guides from AA World Services to Help the Newcomer

- *This Is AA*
- *Frequently Asked Questions*
- *A Newcomer Asks*
  - *Is AA for me*
  - *AA at a Glance*
A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I am responsible…

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible.

This is A.A.

An introduction to the A.A. Recovery Program
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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. 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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This Is A.A.

...an introduction to the A.A. recovery program
Only you can decide

If you seem to be having trouble with your drinking, or if your drinking has reached the point where it worries you a bit, you may be interested in knowing something about Alcoholics Anonymous and the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism. After reading this brief outline, you may decide that A.A. has nothing to offer you. Should this be the case, we suggest only that you keep an open mind on the subject. Consider your drinking carefully in the light of what you may learn from these pages. Determine, for yourself, whether or not alcohol has truly become a problem for you. And remember that you will always be most welcome to join the thousands of men and women in A.A. who have put their drinking problems behind them and now lead “normal” lives of constructive, day-by-day sobriety.
Who we are

We in A.A. are men and women who have discovered, and admitted, that we cannot control alcohol. We have learned that we must live without it if we are to avoid disaster for ourselves and those close to us.

With local groups in thousands of communities, we are part of an informal international fellowship, which now has members in more than 180 countries. We have but one primary purpose: to stay sober ourselves and to help others who may turn to us for help in achieving sobriety.

We are not reformers, and we are not allied with any group, cause, or religious denomination. We have no wish to dry up the world. We do not recruit new members, but we do welcome them. We do not impose our experience with problem drinking on others, but we do share it when we are asked to do so.

Within our membership may be found men and women of all ages and many different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Some of us drank for many years before coming to the realization we could not handle alcohol. Others were fortunate enough to appreciate, early in life or in their drinking careers, that alcohol had become unmanageable.

The consequences of our alcoholic drinking have also varied. A few of us had become derelicts before turning to A.A. for help. Some had lost family, possessions, and self-respect. We had been on skid row in many cities. Some of us had been hospitalized or jailed times without number. We had committed grave offenses — against society, our families, our employers, and ourselves.

Others among us have never been jailed or hospitalized. Nor had we lost jobs or families through drinking. But we finally came to a point...
where we realized that alcohol was interfering with normal living. When we discovered that we could not live without alcohol, we, too, sought help through A.A.

All the great faiths are represented in our Fellowship, and many religious leaders have encouraged our growth. There are also atheists and agnostics among us. Belief in, or adherence to, a formal creed is not a condition of membership.

We are united by our common problem, alcohol. Meeting and talking and helping other alcoholics, together we are somehow able to stay sober and to lose the compulsion to drink, once a dominant force in our lives.

We do not think we are the only people who have the answer to problem drinking. We know that the A.A. program works for us, and we have seen it work for every newcomer, almost without exception, who honestly and sincerely wanted to quit drinking.

Through A.A., we have learned a number of things about alcoholism and about ourselves. We try to keep these facts fresh in our thinking at all times, because they seem to be the key to our sobriety. For us, sobriety must always come first.

**What we have learned about alcoholism**

The first thing we have learned about alcoholism is that it is one of the oldest problems in history. Only recently have we begun to benefit from new approaches to the problem. Doctors today, for example, know a great deal more about alcoholism than their predecessors did only two generations ago. They are beginning to define the problem and study it in detail.

While there is no formal “A.A. definition” of alcoholism, most of us agree that, for us, it could be described as a *physical compulsion, coupled with a mental obsession*. We mean that we had a distinct physical desire to consume alcohol beyond our capacity to control it, and in defiance of all rules of common sense. We not only had an abnormal craving for alcohol, but we frequently
yielded to it at the worst possible times. We did not know when (or how) to stop drinking. Often, we did not seem to have sense enough to know when not to begin.

As alcoholics, we have learned the hard way that willpower alone, however strong in other respects, was not enough to keep us sober. We have tried laying off for specified periods. We have taken solemn pledges. We have switched brands and beverages. We have tried drinking only during certain hours. But none of our plans worked. We always wound up, sooner or later, by getting drunk when we not only wanted to stay sober, but had every rational incentive for staying sober.

We have gone through stages of dark despair when we were sure that there was something wrong with us mentally. We came to hate ourselves for wasting the talents with which we had been endowed and for the trouble we were causing our families and others. Frequently, we indulged in self-pity and proclaimed that nothing could ever help us.

We can smile at those recollections now, but at the time they were grim, unpleasant experiences.

**Alcoholism — an illness**

Today we are willing to accept the idea that, as far as we are concerned, alcoholism is an illness, a progressive illness which can never be “cured,” but which, like some other illnesses, can be arrested. We agree that there is nothing shameful about having an illness, provided we face the problem honestly and try to do something about it. We are perfectly willing to admit that we are allergic to alcohol and that it is simply common sense to stay away from the source of our allergy.

We understand now that once a person has crossed the invisible borderline from heavy drinking to compulsive alcoholic drinking, that person will always remain an alcoholic. So far as we know, there can never be any turning back to “normal” social drinking. “Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic” is a simple fact we have to live with.
We have also learned that there are few alternatives for alcoholics. If they continue to drink, their problem will become progressively worse; they seem assuredly on the path to skid row, to hospitals, to jails or other institutions, or to early graves. The only alternative is to stop drinking completely, to abstain from even the smallest quantity of alcohol in any form. If they are willing to follow this course, and to take advantage of the help available to them, a whole new life can open up for alcoholics.

There were times in our drinking careers when we were convinced that all we had to do to control our drinking was to quit after the second drink, the fifth, or some other number. Only gradually did we come to appreciate that it was not the fifth or the tenth or the twentieth drink that got us drunk; it was the first! The first drink was the one that did the damage. The first drink was the one that started us on our merry-go-rounds. The first drink was the one that set up a chain reaction of alcoholic thinking that led to our uncontrolled drinking.

A.A. has a way of expressing this: “For an alcoholic, one drink is too many and a thousand are not enough.”

Another thing that many of us learned during our drinking days was that enforced sobriety was generally not a very pleasant experience. Some of us were able to stay sober, occasionally, for periods of days, weeks, and even years. But we did not enjoy our sobriety. We felt like martyrs. We became irritable, difficult to live and work with. We persisted in looking forward to the time when we might be able to drink again.

Now that we are in A.A., we have a new outlook on sobriety. We enjoy a sense of release, a feeling of freedom from even the desire to drink. Since we cannot expect to drink normally at any time in the future, we concentrate on living a full life without alcohol today. There is not a thing we can do about yesterday. And tomorrow never comes. Today is the only day we have to worry about. And we know from experience that even the “worst” drunks can go twenty-four hours
without a drink. They may need to postpone that next drink to the next hour, even the next minute — but they learn that it can be put off for a period of time.

When we first heard about A.A., it seemed miraculous that anyone who had really been an uncontrolled drinker could ever achieve and maintain the kind of sobriety that older A.A. members talked about. Some of us were inclined to think that ours was a special kind of drinking, that our experiences had been “different,” that A.A. might work for others, but that it could do nothing for us. Others among us, who had not yet been hurt seriously by their drinking, reasoned that A.A. might be fine for the skid row drunks, but that they could probably handle the problem by themselves.

Our experience in A.A. has taught us two important things. First, all alcoholics face the same basic problems, whether they are panhandling for the price of a short beer or holding down an executive position in a big corporation. Second, we now appreciate that the A.A. recovery program works for almost any alcoholic who honestly wants it to work, no matter what the individual’s background or particular drinking pattern may have been.

**We made a decision**

All of us now in A.A. had to make one crucial decision before we felt secure in the new program of life without alcohol. We had to face the facts about ourselves and our drinking realistically and honestly. We had to admit that we were powerless over alcohol. For some of us, this was the toughest proposition we had ever faced.

We did not know too much about alcoholism. We tied it up with the down-and-out derelict. We thought it surely meant weakness of will, weakness of character. Some of us fought off the step of admitting that we were alcoholics. Others only partially admitted it.

Most of us, however, were relieved when it
was explained to us that alcoholism was an illness. We saw the common sense of doing something about an illness that threatened to destroy us. We quit trying to deceive others — and ourselves — into thinking that we could handle alcohol when all the facts pointed the other way.

We were assured from the beginning that no one could tell us we were alcoholics. The admission had to come from us — not from a doctor or a minister or wife or husband. It had to be based on facts which we ourselves knew. Our friends might understand the nature of our problem, but we were the only ones who could tell for sure whether or not our drinking was out of control.

Frequently we asked: “How can I tell if I am really an alcoholic?” We were told that there were no hard and fast rules for determining alcoholism. We learned that there were, however, certain telltale symptoms. If we got drunk when we had every reason to stay sober, if our drinking had become progressively worse, if we no longer got as much fun from drinking as we once had — these, we learned, were apt to be symptoms of the illness we call alcoholism. Reviewing our drinking experiences and their consequences, most of us were able to discover additional reasons for recognizing the truth about ourselves.

Quite naturally, the prospect of a life without alcohol seemed a dreary one. We feared that our new friends in A.A. would be dull or, worse yet, wild-eyed evangelists. We discovered that they were, instead, human beings like ourselves, but with the special virtue of understanding our problem — sympathetically, without sitting in judgment.

We began to wonder what we had to do to stay sober, what membership in A.A. would cost, and who ran the organization, locally and worldwide. We soon discovered that there are no musts in A.A., that no one is required to follow any formal ritual or pattern of living. We learned also that A.A. has no dues or fees of any kind; expenses of meeting rooms, refreshments, and literature are met by passing the hat. But even contributions of this kind are not a requirement for membership.
It soon became apparent to us that A.A. has only a minimum of organization and has nobody giving orders. Arrangements for meetings are handled by group officers who move on regularly to make room for new people. This “rotation” system is very popular in A.A.

**Staying sober**

How, then, do we manage to stay sober in such an informal, loosely knit fellowship?

The answer is that, once having achieved sobriety, we try to preserve it by observing and following the successful experience of those who have preceded us in A.A.

Their experience provides certain “tools” and guides which we are free to accept or reject, as we may choose. Because our sobriety is the most important thing in our lives today, we think it wise to follow the patterns suggested by those who have already demonstrated that the A.A. recovery program really works.

**The 24-hour plan**

For example, we take no pledges, we don’t say that we will “never” drink again. Instead, we try to follow what we in A.A. call the “24-hour plan.” We concentrate on keeping sober just the current twenty-four hours. We simply try to get through one day at a time without a drink. If we feel the urge for a drink, we neither yield nor resist. We merely put off taking that particular drink until tomorrow.

We try to keep our thinking honest and realistic where alcohol is concerned. If we are tempted to drink — and the temptation usually fades after the first few months in A.A. — we ask ourselves whether the particular drink we have in mind would be worth all the consequences we have experienced from drinking in the past. We bear in mind that we are perfectly free to get drunk, if we want to, that the choice between drinking and not drinking is entirely up to us. Most important of all, we try to face up to the fact that, no matter
how long we may have been dry, we will always be alcoholics — and alcoholics, as far as we know, can never again drink socially or normally.

We follow the experience of the successful “oldtimers” in another respect. We usually keep coming regularly to meetings of the local A.A. group with which we have become affiliated. There is no rule which makes such attendance compulsory. Nor can we always explain why we seem to get a lift out of hearing the personal stories and interpretations of other members. Most of us, however, feel that attendance at meetings and other informal contacts with fellow A.A.s are important factors in the maintenance of our sobriety.

**Twelve Steps**

Early in our association with A.A. we heard about the “Twelve Steps” of recovery from alcoholism. We learned that these Steps represented an attempt by the first members to record their own progress from uncontrolled drinking to sobriety. We discovered that a key factor in this progress seemed to be humility, coupled with reliance upon a Power greater than ourselves. While some members prefer to call this Power “God,” we were told that this was purely a matter of personal interpretation; we could conceive of the Power in any terms we thought fit. Since alcohol had obviously been a power greater than ourselves during our drinking days, we had to admit that perhaps we could not run the whole show ourselves and that it made sense to turn elsewhere for help. As we have grown in A.A., our concept of a greater Power has usually become more mature. But it has always been our personal concept; no one has forced it upon us.

Finally, we noted from the Twelfth Step and from the experience of older members, that work with other alcoholics who turned to A.A. for help was an effective way of strengthening our own sobriety. Whenever possible, we tried to do our share, always keeping in mind that the other person was the only one who could determine
whether or not he or she was an alcoholic.

We were also guided by the experience of the many A.A.s who have given new meaning to three time-worn sayings or slogans. “First Things First” is one of the slogans, reminding us that, much as we would like to try, we cannot do everything at once, that we have to remember the prior importance of sobriety in any attempt to rebuild our lives.

“Easy Does It” is another old slogan with new meaning for alcoholics who are frequently guilty of working too feverishly at whatever they are doing. Experience shows that alcoholics should, and can, learn to pace themselves. “Live and Let Live” is the third slogan, a recurring suggestion that alcoholics, no matter how many years of sobriety they have, cannot afford to let themselves become intolerant of others.

A.A. books and pamphlets are also helpful. Soon after we came into A.A., most of us had an opportunity to read Alcoholics Anonymous, A.A.’s book of experience in which early members first recorded their stories and the principles which they believed had helped them to recover. Many members, sober for years, continue to refer to this and other A.A. books for insight and inspiration. (They are all listed at the end of this pamphlet.) A.A. also publishes an international monthly magazine called the AA Grapevine for newcomers and oldtimers alike.

Because A.A. is essentially a way of life, few of us have ever been able to describe with complete accuracy just how the various elements in the recovery program contribute to our present sobriety. We do not all interpret or live the A.A. program in exactly the same way. We can all testify, however, that A.A. works for us when many other ventures into sobriety have failed. Many members who have been sober for years say that they simply accepted the program “on faith” and do not yet fully understand how A.A. works for them. Meanwhile, they keep trying to pass their faith along to others who still understand all too well the disastrous way in which alcohol works against the alcoholic.
Will A.A. work for everyone?

The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism, we believe, will work for almost anyone who has a desire to stop drinking. It may work even for those who feel they are being prodded in the direction of A.A. Many of us made our first contact with A.A. because of social or job pressures. Later, we made our own decision.

We have seen some alcoholics stumble for a while before “getting” the program. We have seen others who made only token efforts to follow the tested principles through which over a million of us now maintain our sobriety; token efforts are generally not enough.

But, no matter how down-and-out an alcoholic may be, or how high he or she may be on the social and economic scales, we know from experience and observation that A.A. offers a sober way out of the squirrel cage of confused problem drinking. Most of us have found it an easy way.

When we first turned to A.A., many of us had a number of serious problems — problems involving money, family, job, and our own personalities. We soon discovered that our immediate central problem was alcohol. Once we had that problem under control, we were able to make successful approaches to the other problems. Solutions to these problems have not always come easily, but we have been able to cope with them far more effectively when sober than we were able to do during our drinking days.

‘A new dimension’

There was a time when many of us believed that alcohol was the only thing that made life bearable. We could not even dream of a life without drinking. Today, through the A.A. program, we do not feel that we have been deprived of anything. Rather, we have been freed and find that a new dimension has been added to our lives. We have new friends, new horizons, and new attitudes. After years of despair and frustration, many of us feel that we have really begun to live for the first time. We enjoy sharing that new life.
with anyone who is still suffering from alcoholism, as we once suffered, and who seeks a way out of the darkness and into the light.

Alcoholism is one of the major American health problems. It has been estimated that millions of men and women continue to suffer, perhaps unnecessarily, from this progressive illness. As members of A.A. we welcome the opportunity to share our experience in arresting this illness with anyone who seeks help. We appreciate that nothing we can say will have any real meaning until the alcoholic personally is ready to admit as we once did, “Alcohol has me licked, and I want help.”

Where to find A.A.

A.A. help is available without charge or obligation. There are groups of us in many cities, villages, and rural areas throughout the world. Look for “A.A.” or “Alcoholics Anonymous” as listed online or in the community telephone directory. Information about local meetings may often be obtained from doctors and nurses, from the clergy, newspaper people, police officials, and alcoholism facilities that are familiar with our program.

Those who cannot get in touch with a group in their community are invited to write to our world service office: General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 (or visit our website at aa.org). They will put you in touch with the group nearest you. If you live in a remote area and there is no nearby group, they will tell you how a number of “lone” members are staying sober by using A.A. principles and the A.A. program.

Anyone who turns to A.A. can be assured that his or her anonymity will be protected.

If you feel that you may have an alcoholic problem and earnestly want to stop drinking, more than two million of us can testify that A.A. is working for us — and that there is no reason in the world why it should not work for you.
THE TWELVE STEPS
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. 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 A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., 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 A.A. 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.

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**BOOKS**
- ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
- TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
- DAILY REFLECTIONS
- ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
- AS BILL SEES IT
- DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
- 'PASS IT ON'

**BOOKLETS**
- LIVING SOBER
- CAME TO BELIEVE
- A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

**PAMPHLETS**
- Experience, Strength and Hope: WOMEN IN A.A.
- A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC
- A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
- YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.
- A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE
- LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
- THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
- A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES — AND THEIR SPONSORS
- ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
- A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
- DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
- MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
- MEMO TO AN INMATE
- IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
  (An illustrated pamphlet for inmates)

**About A.A.:**
- FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
- IS A.A. FOR ME?
- IS A.A. FOR YOU?
- A NEWCOMER ASKS
- IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
- THIS IS A.A.
- QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
- THE A.A. GROUP
- PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
- THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
- SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
- THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
- THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
- THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
- HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
- A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
- A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
- BRIDGING THE GAP
- A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
- LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
- UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

**For Professionals:**
- A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
- A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
- IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
- ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
  FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
- A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
- IS THERE A PROBLEM DRinker IN THE WORKPLACE?
- MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.
- A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
- A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

**VIDEOS**
(available on aa.org)
- A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
- HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
- A NEW FREEDOM
- CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS

For Professionals:
- A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
- A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
- A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

**PERIODICALS**
- AA GRAPEVINE (monthly)
- LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish)
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A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
A MEMBER’S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

VIDEOS (available on aa.org)
A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS
AA GRAPEVINE (monthly)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish)
A DECLARATION OF UNITY
This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

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

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

For additional information, visit www.aa.org (Information for Professionals) or contact the Cooperation with the Professional Community desk at the General Service Office: cpc@aa.org or 212-870-3400.
*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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. 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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Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.
Questions and Answers
About Alcoholics Anonymous

Several million people have probably heard or read about Alcoholics Anonymous since its beginnings in 1935. Some are relatively familiar with the program of recovery from alcoholism that has helped more than 2,000,000 problem drinkers. Others have only a vague impression that A.A. is some sort of organization that somehow helps drunks stop drinking.

This pamphlet is designed for those who are interested in A.A. for themselves, for a friend or relative, or simply because they wish to be better informed about this unusual Fellowship. Included on the following pages are answers to many of the specific questions that have been asked about A.A. in the past. They add up to the story of a loosely knit society of men and women who have one great interest in common: the desire to stay sober themselves and to help other alcoholics who seek help for their drinking problem.

The thousands of men and women who have come into A.A. in recent years are not altruistic do-gooders. Their eagerness and willingness to help other alcoholics may be termed enlightened self-interest. Members of A.A. appreciate that their own sobriety is largely dependent on continuing contact with alcoholics.

After reading this pamphlet, you may have questions that do not seem to be answered fully in this brief summary. A.A. groups in many metropolitan areas have a central or intergroup office, listed in the telephone book under “Alcoholics Anonymous.” It can direct you to the nearest A.A. meeting, where members will be glad to give you additional information. In smaller communities, a single group may have a telephone listing. If there is no A.A. group near you, feel free to write directly to Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or visit our website at aa.org. You can be sure that your anonymity will be protected.
Alcoholism and Alcoholics

Not too long ago, alcoholism was viewed as a moral problem. Today, many regard it primarily as a health problem. To each problem drinker, it will always remain an intensely personal matter. Alcoholics who approach A.A. frequently ask questions that apply to their own experience, their own fears, and their own hopes for a better way of life.

What is alcoholism?

There are many different ideas about what alcoholism really is.

The explanation that seems to make sense to most A.A. members is that alcoholism is an illness, a progressive illness, which can never be cured but which, like some other diseases, can be arrested. Going one step further, many A.A.s feel that the illness represents the combination of a physical sensitivity to alcohol and a mental obsession with drinking, which, regardless of consequences, cannot be broken by willpower alone.

Before they are exposed to A.A., many alcoholics who are unable to stop drinking think of themselves as morally weak or, possibly, mentally unbalanced. The A.A. concept is that alcoholics are sick people who can recover if they will follow a simple program that has proved successful for more than two million men and women.

Once alcoholism has set in, there is nothing morally wrong about being ill. At this stage, free will is not involved, because the sufferer has lost the power of choice over alcohol. The important thing is to face the facts of one’s illness and to take advantage of the help that is available. There must also be a desire to get well. Experience shows that the A.A. program will work for all alcoholics who are sincere in their efforts to stop drinking; it usually will not work for those not absolutely certain that they want to stop.

How can I tell if I am really an alcoholic?

Only you can make that decision. Many who are now in A.A. have previously been told that they were not alcoholics, that all they needed was more willpower, a change of scenery, more rest, or a few new hobbies in order to straighten out. These same
people finally turned to A.A. because they felt, deep down inside, that alcohol had them licked and that they were ready to try anything that would free them from the compulsion to drink.

Some of these men and women went through terrifying experiences with alcohol before they were ready to admit that alcohol was not for them. They became derelicts, stole, lied, cheated, and even killed while they were drinking. They took advantage of their employers and abused their families. They were completely unreliable in their relations with others. They wasted their material, mental, and spiritual assets.

Many others with far less tragic records have turned to A.A., too. They have never been jailed or hospitalized. Their too-heavy drinking may not have been noticed by their closest relatives and friends. But they knew enough about alcoholism as a progressive illness to scare them. They joined A.A. before they had paid too heavy a price.

There is a saying in A.A. that there is no such thing as being a little bit alcoholic. Either you are, or you are not. And only the individual involved can say whether or not alcohol has become an unmanageable problem.

**Can an alcoholic ever drink ‘normally’ again?**

So far as can be determined, no one who has become an alcoholic has ever ceased to be an alcoholic. The mere fact of abstaining from alcohol for months or even years has never qualified an alcoholic to drink “normally” or socially. Once the individual has crossed the borderline from heavy drinking to irresponsible alcoholic drinking, there seems to be no retreat. Few alcoholics deliberately try to drink themselves into trouble, but trouble seems to be the inevitable consequence of an alcoholic’s drinking. After quitting for a period, the alcoholic may feel it is safe to try a few beers or a few glasses of light wine. This can mislead the person into drinking only with meals. But it is not too long before the alcoholic is back in the old pattern of too-heavy drinking — in spite of all efforts to set limits for only moderate, social drinking.

The answer, based on A.A. experience, is that if you are an alcoholic, you will never be able to control your drinking for any length of time. That
leaves two paths open: to let your drinking become worse and worse with all the damaging results that follow, or to quit completely and to develop a new pattern of sober, constructive living.

Can’t an A.A. member drink even beer?
There are, of course, no musts in A.A., and no one checks up on members to determine whether or not they are drinking anything. The answer to this question is that if a person is an alcoholic, touching alcohol in any form cannot be risked. Alcohol is alcohol whether it is found in a martini, a Scotch and soda, a bourbon and branch water, a glass of champagne — or a short beer. For the alcoholic, one drink of alcohol in any form is likely to be too much, and twenty drinks are not enough.

To be sure of sobriety, alcoholics simply have to stay away from alcohol, regardless of the quantity, mixture, or concentration they may think they can control.

Obviously, few persons are going to get drunk on one or two bottles of beer. The alcoholic knows this as well as the next person. But alcoholics may convince themselves that they are simply going to take two or three beers and then quit for the day. Occasionally, they may actually follow this program for a number of days or weeks. Eventually, they decide that as long as they are drinking, they may as well “do a good job.” So they increase their consumption of beer or wine. Or they switch to hard liquor. And again, they are back where they started.

I can stay sober quite a while between binges; how can I tell whether I need A.A.?
Most A.A.s will say that it’s how you drink, not how often, that determines whether or not you are an alcoholic. Many problem drinkers can go weeks, months, and occasionally years between their bouts with liquor. During their periods of sobriety, they may not give alcohol a second thought. Without mental or emotional effort, they are able to take it or leave it alone, and they prefer to leave it alone.

Then, for some unaccountable reason, or for no reason at all, they go off on a first-class binge.

They neglect job, family, and other civic and social responsibilities. The spree may last a single
night, or it may be prolonged for days or weeks. When it is over, the drinker is usually weak and remorseful, determined never to let it happen again. But it does happen again.

This type of “periodic” drinking is baffling, not only to those around the drinker, but also to the person still drinking. He or she cannot understand why there should be so little interest in alcohol during the periods between binges, or so little control over it once the drinking starts.

The periodic drinker may or may not be an alcoholic. But if drinking has become unmanageable and if the periods between binges are becoming shorter, chances are the time has come to face up to the problem. If the person is ready to admit to being an alcoholic, then the first step has been taken toward the continuing sobriety enjoyed by thousands upon thousands of A.A. members.

Others say I am not an alcoholic. But my drinking seems to be getting worse. Should I join A.A.?

Many members of A.A., during their drinking days, were assured by relatives, friends, and doctors that they were not alcoholics. The alcoholic usually adds to the problem by an unwillingness to realistically face the facts of drinking. By not being completely honest, the problem drinker makes it difficult for a doctor to provide any help. The amazing thing, in fact, is that so many doctors have been able to penetrate the typical problem drinker’s deceptions and diagnose the problem correctly.

It cannot be emphasized too often that the important decision — am I an alcoholic? — has to be made by the drinker. Only he or she — not the doctor, the family, or friends — can make it. But once it is made, half the battle for sobriety is won. If the question is left to others to decide, the alcoholic may be dragging out needlessly the dangers and misery of uncontrollable drinking.

Can a person achieve sobriety all alone by reading A.A. literature?

A few people have stopped drinking after reading Alcoholics Anonymous, the A.A. “Big Book,” which sets forth the basic principles of the recovery program. But nearly all of those who were in a posi-
tion to do so promptly sought out other alcoholics with whom to share their experience and sobriety.

The A.A. program works best for the individual when it is recognized and accepted as a program involving other people. Working with other alcoholics in the local A.A. group, problem drinkers seem to learn more about their problem and how to handle it. They find themselves surrounded by others who share their past experiences, their present problems, and their hopes. They shed the feelings of loneliness that may have been an important factor in their compulsion to drink.

Won’t everyone know I am an alcoholic if I come into A.A.?

Anonymity is and always has been the basis of the A.A. program. Most members, after they have been in A.A. awhile, have no particular objection if the word gets around that they have joined a fellowship that enables them to stay sober. Traditionally, A.A.s never disclose their association with the movement in print, on the air, or through any other public media. And no one has the right to break the anonymity of another member.

This means that the newcomer can turn to A.A. with the assurance that no newfound friends will violate confidences relating to his or her drinking problem. The older members of the group appreciate how the newcomer feels. They can remember their own fears about being identified publicly with what seems to be a terrifying word — “alcoholic.”

Once in A.A., newcomers may be slightly amused at those past worries about its becoming generally known that they have stopped drinking. When alcoholics drink, news of their escapades travels with remarkable speed. Most alcoholics have made names for themselves as full-fledged drunks by the time they turn to A.A. Their drinking, with rare exceptions, is not likely to be a well-kept secret. Under these circumstances, it would be unusual indeed if the good news of the alcoholic’s continuing sobriety did not also cause comment.

Whatever the circumstances, no disclosure of the newcomer’s affiliation with A.A. can rightfully be made by anyone but the newcomer, and then only in such a way that the Fellowship will not be harmed.
How can I get along in business, where I have to make a lot of social contacts, if I don’t drink?

Social drinking has become an accepted part of business enterprise in many fields these days. Many contacts with customers and prospective customers are timed to coincide with occasions when cocktails, highballs, or cordials seem the appropriate order of the day or night. Many now in A.A. would be the first to concede that they had often transacted important business in bars, cocktail lounges, or hotel rooms or even during parties in private homes.

It is surprising, however, how much of the world’s work is accomplished without the benefit of alcohol. It is equally surprising to many alcoholics to discover how many recognized leaders in business, industry, professional life, and the arts have attained success without dependence on alcohol.

In fact, many who are now sober in A.A. admit that they used “business contacts” as one of several excuses for drinking. Now that they no longer drink, they find that they can actually accomplish more than they used to. Sobriety has proved no hindrance to their ability to win friends and influence people who might contribute to their economic success.

This does not mean that all A.A.s suddenly avoid their friends or business associates who drink. If a friend wants a cocktail or two before lunch, the A.A. will usually take a soft drink, coffee, or one of the popular juices. If the A.A. is invited to a cocktail party being given for business reasons, there will generally be no hesitation about attending. The alcoholic knows from experience that most of the other guests are concerned with their own drinks, and are not likely to care particularly what anyone else happens to be drinking.

While beginning to take pride in the quality and quantity of work on the job, the newcomer to A.A. is likely to find that the payoff in most lines of business is still based on performance. This was not always apparent in the drinking days. The alcoholic may then have been convinced that charm, ingenuity, and conviviality were the chief keys to business success. While these qualities are undoubtedly helpful to the person who drinks in
a controlled manner, they are not enough for the alcoholic, if only because the latter, while drinking, is inclined to assign to them far more importance than they deserve.

**Will A.A. work for the person who has really ‘hit bottom’?**

The record shows that A.A. will work for almost anyone who really wants to stop drinking, no matter what the person’s economic or social background may be. A.A. today includes among its members many who have been on skid row, in jails, and in other public institutions.

The down-and-outer is at no disadvantage in coming to A.A. His or her basic problem, the thing that has made life unmanageable, is identical with the central problem of every other member of A.A. The worth of a member in A.A. is not judged on the basis of the clothes worn, the handling of language, or the size (or existence) of the bank balance. The only thing that counts in A.A. is whether or not the newcomer really wants to stop drinking. If the desire is there, the person will be welcomed. Chances are, the most rugged drinking story the new member could tell will be topped by an amazing number of people in the group, with similar backgrounds and experiences.

**Do alcoholics who are already sober ever join A.A.?**

Most men and women turn to A.A. when they hit the low point in their drinking careers. But this is not always the case. A number of persons have joined the Fellowship long after they have had what they hoped was their last drink. One person, recognizing that alcohol could not be controlled, had been dry for six or seven years before becoming a member. Self-enforced sobriety had not been a happy experience. Rising tension and a series of upsets over minor problems of daily living were about to lead to further experiments with alcohol, when a friend suggested that A.A. should be investigated. Since then, this person has been a member for many years, and says there is no comparison between the happy sobriety of today and the self-pitying sobriety of yesterday.

Others report similar experiences. While they
know that it is possible to stay grimly sober for considerable periods of time, they say that it is much easier for them to enjoy and strengthen their sobriety when they meet and work with other alcoholics in A.A. Like most members of the human race, they see little point in deliberately doing things the hard way. Given the choice of sobriety with or without A.A., they deliberately choose A.A.

**Why is A.A. interested in problem drinkers?**

Members of A.A. have a selfish interest in offering a helping hand to other alcoholics who have not yet achieved sobriety. First, they know from experience that this type of activity, usually referred to as “Twelfth Step work,” helps them to stay sober. Their lives now have a great and compelling interest. Very likely, reminders of their own previous experience with alcohol help them to avoid the overconfidence that could lead to a relapse. Whatever the explanation, A.A.s who give freely of their time and effort to help other alcoholics seldom have trouble preserving their own sobriety.

A.A.s are anxious to help problem drinkers for a second reason: It gives them an opportunity to square their debt to those who helped them. It is the only practical way in which the individual’s debt to A.A. can ever be repaid. The A.A. member knows that sobriety cannot be bought and that there is no long-term lease on it. The A.A. does know, however, that a new way of life without alcohol may be had simply for the asking, if it is honestly wanted and willingly shared with those who follow.

Traditionally, A.A. never “recruits” members, never urges that anyone should become a member, and never solicits or accepts outside funds.
If the newcomer is satisfied that he or she is an alcoholic and that A.A. may be able to help, then a number of specific questions about the nature, structure, and history of the movement itself usually come up. Here are some of the most common ones.

**What is Alcoholics Anonymous?**

There are two practical ways to describe A.A. The first is the familiar description of purposes and objectives that appears earlier:

“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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. 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.”

The “common problem” is alcoholism. The men and women who consider themselves members of A.A. are, and always will be, alcoholics, even though they may have other addictions. They have finally recognized that they are no longer able to handle alcohol in any form; they now stay away from it completely. The important thing is that they do not try to deal with the problem single-handedly. They bring the problem out into the open with other alcoholics. This sharing of “experience, strength and hope” seems to be the key element that makes it possible for them to live without alcohol and, in most cases, without even wanting to drink.

The second way to describe Alcoholics Anonymous is to outline the structure of the Society. Numerically, A.A. consists of more than 2,000,000 men and women, in approximately 180 countries. These people meet in local groups that range in size from a handful of ex-drinkers in some localities to many hundreds in larger communities.
In the populous metropolitan areas, there may be scores of neighborhood groups, each holding its own regular meetings. Many A.A. meetings are open to the public; some groups also hold “closed meetings,” where members are encouraged to discuss problems that might not be fully appreciated by nonalcoholics.

The local group is the core of the A.A. Fellowship. Its open meetings welcome alcoholics and their families in an atmosphere of friendliness and helpfulness. There are now more than 118,000 groups throughout the world, including hundreds in hospitals, prisons, and other institutions.

**How did A.A. get started?**

Alcoholics Anonymous had its beginnings in Akron, Ohio, in 1935 when a New Yorker on business there and successfully sober for the first time in years sought out another alcoholic. During his few months of sobriety, the New Yorker had noticed that his desire to drink lessened when he tried to help other drunks to get sober. In Akron, he was directed to a local doctor with a drinking problem. Working together, the businessman and the doctor found that their ability to stay sober seemed closely related to the amount of help and encouragement they were able to give other alcoholics.

For four years, the new movement, nameless and without any organization or descriptive literature, grew slowly. Groups were established in Akron, New York, Cleveland, and a few other centers.

In 1939, with the publication of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, from which the Fellowship derived its name, and as the result of the help of a number of nonalcoholic friends, the Society began to attract national and international attention.

A service office was opened in New York City to handle the thousands of inquiries and requests for literature that pour in each year.

**Are there any rules in A.A.?**

The absence of rules, regulations, or musts is one of the unique features of A.A. as a local group and as a worldwide fellowship. There are no bylaws that say a member has to attend a certain number of meetings within a given period.

Understandably, most groups have an unwrit-
ten tradition that anyone who is still drinking, and boisterous enough to disturb a meeting, may be asked to leave; the same person will be welcomed back at any time when not likely to disrupt a meeting. Meanwhile, members of the group will do their best to help bring sobriety to the person if there is a sincere desire to stop drinking.

**What does membership in A.A. cost?**

Membership in A.A. involves no financial obligations of any kind. The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism is available to anyone who has a desire to stop drinking, whether he or she is flat broke or the possessor of millions.

Most local groups “pass the hat” at meetings to defray the cost of renting a meeting place and other meeting expenses, including coffee, sandwiches, cakes, or whatever else may be served. In a large majority of the groups, part of the money thus collected is voluntarily contributed to A.A.’s national and international services. These group funds are used exclusively for services designed to help new and established groups and to spread the word of the A.A. recovery program to “the many alcoholics who still don’t know.”

The important consideration is that membership in A.A. is in no way contingent upon financial support of the Fellowship. Many A.A. groups have, in fact, placed strict limitations on the amount that can be contributed by any member. A.A. is entirely self-supporting, and no outside contributions are accepted.

**Who runs A.A.?**

A.A. has no officers or executives who wield power or authority over the Fellowship. There is no “government” in A.A. It is obvious, however, that even in an informal organization, certain jobs have to be done. In the local group, for example, someone has to arrange for a suitable meeting place; meetings have to be scheduled and programmed; provision has to be made for serving the coffee and snacks that contribute so much to the informal comradeship of A.A. gatherings; many groups also consider it wise to assign to someone the responsibility of keeping in touch with the national and international development of A.A.
When a local group is first formed, self-appointed workers may take over responsibility for these tasks, acting informally as servants of the group. As soon as possible, however, these responsibilities are, by election, rotated to others in the group for limited periods of service. A typical A.A. group may have a chairperson, a secretary, a program committee, a food committee, a treasurer, and a general service representative who acts for the group at regional or area meetings. Newcomers who have a reasonable period of sobriety behind them are urged to take part in handling group responsibilities.

At the national and international levels, there are also specific jobs to be done. Literature has to be written, printed, and distributed to groups and individuals who ask for it. Inquiries from both new and established groups have to be answered. Individual requests for information about A.A. and its program of recovery from alcoholism have to be filled. Assistance and information have to be provided for doctors, members of the clergy, business people, and directors of institutions. Sound public relations must be established and maintained in dealing with press, radio, television, motion pictures, and other communications media.

To provide for the sound growth of A.A., early members of the Society, together with nonalcoholic friends, established a custodial board — now known as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. The board serves as the custodian of A.A. Traditions and overall service, and it assumes responsibility for the service standards of A.A.’s General Service Office at New York.

The link between the board and the A.A. groups of the U.S. and Canada is the A.A. General Service Conference. The Conference, comprising about 93 delegates from A.A. areas, the 21 trustees on the board, General Service Office staff members, and others, meets for several days each year. The Conference is exclusively a consultative service agency. It has no authority to regulate or govern the Fellowship.

Thus the answer to “Who runs A.A.?” is that the Society is a uniquely democratic movement, with no central government and only a minimum of formal organization.
Is A.A. a religious society?

A.A. is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief as a condition of membership. Although it has been endorsed and approved by many religious leaders, it is not allied with any organization or sect. Included in its membership are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, members of other major religious bodies, agnostics, and atheists.

The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism is undeniably based on acceptance of certain spiritual values. The individual member is free to interpret those values as he or she thinks best, or not to think about them at all.

Most members, before turning to A.A., had already admitted that they could not control their drinking. Alcohol had become a power greater than themselves, and it had been accepted on those terms. A.A. suggests that to achieve and maintain sobriety, alcoholics need to accept and depend upon another Power recognized as greater than themselves. Some alcoholics choose to consider the A.A. group itself as the power greater than themselves; for many others, this Power is God — as they, individually, understand Him; still others rely upon entirely different concepts of a Higher Power.

Some alcoholics, when they first turn to A.A., have definite reservations about accepting any concept of a Power greater than themselves. Experience shows that, if they will keep an open mind on the subject and keep coming to A.A. meetings, they are not likely to have too difficult a time in working out an acceptable solution to this distinctly personal problem.

Is A.A. a temperance movement?

No. A.A. has no relation to temperance movements. A.A. “neither endorses nor opposes any causes.” This phrase, from the widely accepted outline of the purpose of the Society, naturally applies to the question of so-called temperance movements. The alcoholic who has become sober and is attempting to follow the A.A. recovery program has an attitude toward alcohol that might be likened to the attitude of a hayfever sufferer toward goldenrod.
While many A.A.s appreciate that alcohol may be all right for most people, they know it to be poison for them. The average A.A. has no desire to deprive anyone of something that, properly handled, is a source of pleasure. The A.A. merely acknowledges being personally unable to handle the stuff.

Are there many women alcoholics in A.A.?
The number of women who are finding help in A.A. for their drinking problem increases daily. Approximately 38 percent of present-day members are women; among newcomers, the proportion has been rising steadily. Like the men in the Fellowship, they represent every conceivable social background and pattern of drinking.

The general feeling seems to be that a woman alcoholic faces special problems. Because society has tended to apply different standards to the behavior of women, some women may feel that a greater stigma is attached to their uncontrolled use of alcohol.

A.A. makes no distinctions of this type. Whatever her age, social standing, financial status, or education, the woman alcoholic, like her male counterpart, can find understanding and help in A.A. Within the local group setup, women A.A.s play the same significant roles that men do.

Are there many young people in A.A.?
One of the most heartening trends in the growth of A.A. is the fact that more and more young men and women are being attracted to the program before their problem drinking results in complete disaster. Now that the progressive nature of alcoholism is better appreciated, these young people recognize that, if one is an alcoholic, the best time to arrest the illness is in its early stages.

In the first days of the movement, it was commonly thought that the only logical candidates for A.A. were those men and women who had lost their jobs, had hit skid row, had completely disrupted their family lives, or had otherwise isolated themselves from normal social relationships over a period of years.

Today, many of the young people turning to A.A. are in their twenties. Some are still in their teens. The majority of them still have jobs and families.
Many have never been jailed or committed to institutions. But they have seen the handwriting on the wall. They recognize that they are alcoholics, and they see no point in letting alcoholism run its inevitable disastrous course with them.

Their need for recovery is just as compelling as that of the older men and women who had no opportunity to turn to A.A. in their youth. Once they are in A.A., the young people and the oldsters are rarely conscious of their age differentials. In A.A., both groups start a new life from the same milestone — their last drink.

Group Meetings

The local group meeting is the center and heart of the A.A. Fellowship. It is, in many ways, a unique type of gathering and one that is likely to seem strange to the newcomer. The questions and answers that follow suggest how the A.A. meeting functions and how the newcomer fits into the group picture.

How does a person join A.A.?

No one “joins” A.A. in the usual sense of the term. No application for membership has to be filled out. In fact, many groups do not even keep membership records. There are no initiation fees, no dues, no assessments of any kind.

Most people become associated with A.A. simply by attending the meetings of a particular local group. Their introduction to A.A. may have come about in one of several ways. Having come to the point in their drinking where they sincerely wanted to stop, they may have gotten in touch with A.A. voluntarily. They may have called the local A.A. office listed in the phone book, or they may have written to the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or visited the A.A. website at aa.org.

Others may have been guided to a local A.A. group by a friend, relative, doctor, or spiritual adviser.

Usually, a newcomer to A.A. has had an opportunity to talk to one or more local members before attending the first meeting. This provides an opportunity to learn how A.A. has helped these people. The beginner gets facts about alcoholism
and A.A. that help to determine whether he or she is honestly prepared to give up alcohol. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

There are no membership drives in A.A. If, after attending several meetings, the newcomer decides A.A. is not for him or for her, no one will urge continuation in the association. There may be suggestions about keeping an open mind on the subject, but no one in A.A. will try to make up newcomers’ minds for them. Only the alcoholic concerned can answer the question “Do I need Alcoholics Anonymous?”

**What is an ‘open’ meeting?**

An open meeting of A.A. is a group meeting that any member of the community, alcoholic or non-alcoholic, may attend. The only obligation is that of not disclosing the names of A.A. members outside the meeting.

A typical open meeting will usually have a “leader” and other speakers. The leader opens and closes the meeting and introduces each speaker. With rare exceptions, the speakers at an open meeting are A.A. members. Each, in turn, may review some individual drinking experiences that led to joining A.A. The speaker may also give his or her interpretation of the recovery program and suggest what sobriety has meant personally. All views expressed are purely personal, since all members of A.A. speak only for themselves.

Most open meetings conclude with a social period during which coffee, soft drinks, and cakes or cookies are served.

**What is a ‘closed’ meeting?**

A closed meeting is for A.A. members only, or for those who have a drinking problem and have a desire to stop drinking. Closed meetings give members an opportunity to discuss particular phases of their alcoholic problem that can be understood best only by other alcoholics.

These meetings are usually conducted with maximum informality, and all members are encouraged to participate in the discussions. The closed meetings are of particular value to the newcomer, since they provide an opportunity to ask
questions that may trouble a beginner, and to get the benefit of “older” members’ experience with the recovery program.

May I bring relatives or friends to an A.A. meeting?
In most places, anyone interested in A.A., whether a member or not, is welcome at open meetings of A.A. groups.* Newcomers, in particular, are invited to bring wives, husbands, or friends to these meetings, since their understanding of the recovery program may be an important factor in helping the alcoholic to achieve and maintain sobriety. Many wives and husbands attend as frequently as their spouses and take an active part in the social activities of the local group.

(It will be recalled that “closed” meetings are traditionally limited to alcoholics.)

How often do A.A. members have to attend meetings?
Abraham Lincoln was once asked how long a man’s legs should be. The classic answer was: “Long enough to reach the ground.”

A.A. members don’t have to attend any set number of meetings in a given period. It is purely a matter of individual preference and need. Most members arrange to attend at least one meeting a week. They feel that is enough to satisfy their personal need for contact with the program through a local group. Others attend a meeting nearly every night, in areas where such opportunities are available. Still others may go for relatively long periods without meetings.

The friendly injunction “Keep coming to meetings,” so frequently heard by the newcomer, is based on the experience of the great majority of A.A.s, who find that the quality of their sobriety suffers when they stay away from meetings for too long. Many know from experience that if they do not come to meetings, they may get drunk and that if they are regular in attendance, they seem to have no trouble staying sober.

*Consult the group for local custom.
Newcomers particularly seem to benefit from exposure to a relatively large number of meetings (or other A.A. contacts) during their first weeks and months in a group. By multiplying their opportunities to meet and hear other A.A.s whose drinking experience parallels their own, they seem to be able to strengthen their own understanding of the program and what it can give them.

Nearly all alcoholics, at one time or another, have tried to stay sober on their own. For most, the experience has not been particularly enjoyable — or successful. So long as attendance at meetings helps the alcoholic to maintain sobriety, and to have fun at the same time, it seems to be good sense to be guided by the experience of those who “keep coming to meetings.”

Do A.A.s have to attend meetings for the rest of their lives?

Not necessarily, but — as one member has suggested — “Most of us want to, and some of us may need to.”

Most alcoholics don’t like to be told that they have to do anything for any extended period of time. At first glance, the prospect of having to attend A.A. meetings for all the years of the foreseeable future may seem a heavy load.

The answer, again, is that no one has to do anything in A.A. There is always a choice between doing and not doing a thing — including the crucial choice of whether or not to seek sobriety through A.A.

The primary reason an alcoholic has for attending meetings of an A.A. group is to get help in staying sober today — not tomorrow or next week or ten years from now. Today, the immediate present, is the only period in life that the A.A. can do something about. A.A.s do not worry about tomorrow, or about “the rest of their lives.” The important thing for them is to maintain their sobriety now. They will take care of the future when it arrives.

So the A.A. who wants to do everything possible to insure sobriety today will probably keep going to meetings. But attendance will always be on the basis of taking care of present sobriety. As long as the approach to A.A. is on this basis, no activity, including attendance at meetings, can ever resemble a long-term obligation.
How will I be able to find the time for A.A. meetings, work with other alcoholics, and other A.A. activities?

During our drinking days, most of us somehow managed to minimize the importance of time when there was alcohol to be consumed. Yet the new-comer to A.A. is occasionally dismayed to learn that sobriety will make some demands on time, too. If the beginner is a typical alcoholic, there will be an urge to make up “lost time” in a hurry—to work diligently at a job, to indulge in the pleasures of a homelife too long neglected, to devote time to church or civic affairs. What else is sobriety for, the new member may ask, but to lead a full, normal life, great chunks of it at a time?

A.A., however, is not something that can be taken like a pill. The experience of those who have been successful in the recovery program is worth considering. Almost without exception, the men and women who find their sobriety most satisfying are those who attend meetings regularly, never hesitate to work with other alcoholics seeking help, and take more than a casual interest in the other activities of their groups. They are men and women who recall realistically and honestly the aimless hours spent in bars, the days lost from work, the decreased efficiency, and the remorse that accompanied hangovers on the morning after.

Balanced against such memories as these, the few hours spent in underwriting and strengthening their sobriety add up to a small price indeed.

Can newcomers join A.A. outside their own community?

This question is sometimes raised by persons who seem to have perfectly valid reasons for not wanting to risk identification as alcoholics by any of their neighbors. They may, for example, have employers who are totally unfamiliar with the A.A. program and potentially hostile to anyone who admits the existence of a drinking problem. They may wish desperately to be associated with A.A. as a means of gaining and maintaining sobriety. But they may hesitate to turn to a group in their own community.

The answer to the question is that a person is free to join an A.A. group anywhere he or she
may choose. Obviously, it is more convenient to join the nearest group. It may also be the most straightforward approach to the individual’s problem. The person who turns to A.A. for help is usually, but not always, pretty well identified as a drunk. Inevitably, the good news of this person’s sobriety is bound to spread, too. Few employers or neighbors are likely to resent the source of their worker’s or friend’s continued sobriety, whether it centers in a local A.A. group or one located fifty miles away.

Few people these days are fired from their jobs or ostracized socially because they are sober. If the experience of many thousands of A.A.s is a reliable guide, the best approach for the newcomer is to seek help in the nearest group before beginning to worry about the reactions of others.

If I come into A.A., won’t I miss a lot of friends and a lot of fun?

The best answer to this is the experience of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have already come into A.A. In general, their attitude is that they did not enjoy real friendships or real fun until they joined A.A. Their point of view on both has changed.

Many alcoholics discover that their best friends are delighted to see them face up to the fact that they cannot handle alcohol. No one wants to see a friend continue to hurt.

Naturally, it is important to distinguish between friendships and casual barroom acquaintanceships. The alcoholic is likely to have many acquaintances whose conviviality may be missed for a while. But their place will be taken by the hundreds of A.A.s the newcomer will meet — men and women who offer understanding acceptance, and help in sustaining sobriety at all times.

Few members of A.A. would trade the fun that comes with sobriety for what seemed to be fun while they were drinking.
The Recovery Program

Upon attending only a few meetings, the newcomer is sure to hear references to such things as “the Twelve Steps,” “the Twelve Traditions,” “slips,” “the Big Book,” and other expressions characteristic of A.A. The following paragraphs describe these factors and suggest why they are mentioned frequently by A.A. speakers.

What are the ‘Twelve Steps’?

The “Twelve Steps” are the core of the A.A. program of personal recovery from alcoholism. They are not abstract theories; they are based on the trial-and-error experience of early members of A.A. They describe the attitudes and activities that these early members believe were important in helping them to achieve sobriety. Acceptance of the “Twelve Steps” is not mandatory in any sense.

Experience suggests, however, that members who make an earnest effort to follow these Steps and to apply them in daily living seem to get far more out of A.A. than do those members who seem to regard the Steps casually. It has been said that it is virtually impossible to follow all the Steps literally, day in and day out. While this may be true, in the sense that the Twelve Steps represent an approach to living that is totally new for most alcoholics, many A.A. members feel that the Steps are a practical necessity if they are to maintain their sobriety.

Here is the text of the Twelve Steps, which first appeared in Alcoholics Anonymous, the A.A. book of experience:

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 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

What are the ‘Twelve Traditions’?
The “Twelve Traditions” of A.A. are suggested principles to insure the survival and growth of the thousands of groups that make up the Fellowship. They are based on the experience of the groups themselves during the critical early years of the movement.

The Traditions are important to both oldtimers and newcomers as reminders of the true foundations of A.A. as a society of men and women whose primary concern is to maintain their own sobriety and help others to achieve sobriety:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. 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 A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose
— to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., 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 A.A. 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.

**What are ‘slips’?**

Occasionally a man or woman who has been sober through A.A. will get drunk. In A.A. a relapse of this type is commonly known as a “slip.” It may occur during the first few weeks or months of sobriety or after the alcoholic has been dry a number of years.

Nearly all A.A.s who have been through this experience say that slips can be traced to specific causes. They deliberately forgot that they had admitted they were alcoholics and got overconfident about their ability to handle alcohol. Or they stayed away from A.A. meetings or from informal association with other A.A.s. Or they let themselves become too involved with business or social affairs to remember the importance of being sober. Or they let themselves become tired and were caught with their mental and emotional defenses down.

In other words, most “slips” don’t just happen.
Does A.A. have a basic ‘textbook’?

The Fellowship has four books that are generally accepted as “textbooks.” The first is Alcoholics Anonymous, also known as “the Big Book,” originally published in 1939, revised in 1955, 1976 and 2001. It records the personal stories of 42 representative problem drinkers who achieved stable sobriety for the first time through A.A. It also records the suggested steps and principles that early members believed were responsible for their ability to overcome the compulsion to drink.

The second book is Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, published in 1953. It is an interpretation, by Bill W., a co-founder, of the principles that have thus far assured the continuing survival of individuals and groups within A.A.

A third book, Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, published in 1957, is a brief history of the first two decades of the Fellowship.

The fourth is As Bill Sees It (formerly titled The A.A. Way of Life, a reader by Bill). This is a selection of Bill W.’s writings.

These books may be purchased through local A.A. groups or ordered direct from Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or through the website at aa.org.

What is ‘the 24-hour program’?

“The 24-hour program” is a phrase used to describe a basic A.A. approach to the problem of staying sober. A.A.’s never swear off alcohol for life, never take pledges committing themselves not to take a drink “tomorrow.” By the time they turned to A.A. for help, they had discovered that, no matter how sincere they may have been in promising themselves to abstain from alcohol “in the future,” somehow they forgot the pledge and got drunk. The compulsion to drink proved more powerful than the best intentions not to drink.

The A.A. member recognizes that the biggest problem is to stay sober now! The current 24 hours is the only period the A.A. can do anything about as far as drinking is concerned. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow never comes. “But today,” the A.A. says, “today, I will not take a drink. I may be tempted to take a drink tomorrow — and perhaps I will. But tomorrow is something to worry about
when it comes. My big problem is not to take a drink during this 24 hours.

Along with the 24-hour program, A.A. emphasizes the importance of three slogans that have probably been heard many times by the newcomer before joining A.A. These slogans are: “Easy Does It,” “Live and Let Live,” and “First Things First.” By making these slogans a basic part of the attitude toward problems of daily living, the average A.A. is usually helped substantially in the attempt to live successfully without alcohol.

**What is AA Grapevine?**

AA Grapevine is a monthly pocket-size magazine published for members and friends who seek further sharing of A.A. experience. The only international journal of the Society, Grapevine is edited by a staff made up entirely of A.A.s.

Single copies of the magazine are usually available each month at meetings of local groups, but most readers prefer to receive their copies on a regular subscription basis. In the U.S. the cost of an annual subscription is $28.97, slightly more in Canada; single copies are $2.75. There is also a Spanish edition called La Viña.

**Why doesn’t A.A. seem to work for some people?**

The answer is that A.A. will work only for those who admit that they are alcoholics, who honestly want to stop drinking — and who are able to keep those facts uppermost in their minds at all times.

A.A. usually will not work for the man or woman who has reservations about whether or not he or she is an alcoholic, or who clings to the hope of being able to drink normally again.

Most medical authorities say no one who is an alcoholic can ever drink normally again. The alcoholic must admit and accept this cardinal fact. Coupled with this admission and acceptance must be the desire to stop drinking.

After they have been sober a while in A.A., some people tend to forget that they are alcoholics, with all that this diagnosis implies. Their sobriety makes them overconfident, and they decide to experiment with alcohol again. The results of such experiments are, for the alcoholic, completely predictable. Their drinking invariably becomes progressively worse.
Newcomers’ Questions

A.A. has but one primary purpose, although it may indirectly be responsible for other benefits. The following are questions that are occasionally asked by newcomers to the Fellowship.

Will A.A. help me financially?

Many alcoholics, by the time they turn to A.A. for help with their drinking problems, have also accumulated substantial financial problems. Not unnaturally, some may cherish the hope that A.A. may in some way be able to help them with more pressing financial obligations.

Very early in A.A. experience as a society, it was discovered that money or the lack of it had nothing to do with the newcomer’s ability to achieve sobriety and work his or her way out of the many problems that had been complicated by excessive use of alcohol.

The absence of money — even with a heavy burden of debts — seemed to prove no hindrance to the alcoholic who honestly and sincerely wanted to face up to the realities of a life without alcohol. Once the big problem of alcohol had been cleared away, the other problems, including those related to finances, seemed to work out, too. Some A.A.s have made sensational financial comebacks in relatively brief periods. For others, the road has been hard and long. The basic answer to this question is that A.A. exists for just one purpose, and that purpose is in no way related to material prosperity or the lack thereof.

There is nothing to prevent any member of a group from staking a newcomer to a meal, a suit of clothes, or even a cash loan. That is a matter for individual decision and discretion. It would, however, be misleading if an alcoholic gets the impression that A.A. is any sort of moneyed charity organization.

Will A.A. help me straighten out my family troubles?

Alcohol is frequently a complicating factor in family life, magnifying petty irritations, exposing character defects, and contributing to financial problems. Many men and women, by the time they turn to A.A., have managed to make a complete
mess of their family lives.

Some newcomers to A.A., suddenly aware of their own contributions to chaos, are eager and enthusiastic about making amends and resuming normal patterns of living with those closest to them. Others, with or without cause, continue to feel bitter resentments toward their families.

Almost without exception, newcomers who are sincere in their approach to the A.A. recovery program are successful in mending broken family lives. The bonds that reunite the honest alcoholic with family members are often stronger than ever before. Sometimes, of course, irreparable damage has been done, and a totally new approach to family life has to be developed. But generally, the story is one with a happy ending.

Experience suggests that the alcoholic who comes to A.A. solely to keep peace in the family, and not because of an honest desire to stop drinking, may have difficulty achieving sobriety. The sincere desire for sobriety should come first. Once sober, the alcoholic will find that many of the other problems of daily living can be approached realistically and with very good chance of success.

**Does A.A. operate hospitals or rest homes for alcoholics?**

There are no “A.A. rest homes or hospitals.” Traditionally, no professional services or facilities are ever offered or performed under A.A. sponsorship. By adhering to the tradition of avoiding services that others are prepared to render, A.A. thus avoids any possible misunderstanding of its primary purpose, which is to help alcoholics searching for a way of life without alcohol.

In some areas, service committees made up of individual A.A. members have made arrangements with local hospitals for the admission of alcoholics who are sponsored by A.A.s as individuals, not as representatives of the Fellowship as a whole.

In other areas, individual A.A.s or groups of A.A.s have established rest homes that cater primarily to newcomers to the recovery program. Because of their special understanding of problems confronting the alcoholic, the owners or managers of these homes are often able to help the newcomer during the first crucial period of sobri-
ety. But these homes have no connection with A.A. beyond the fact that they may be operated by persons who achieved their own sobriety through A.A. As a movement, A.A. is never affiliated with business enterprises of any description.

**Does A.A. sponsor any social activity for members?**

Most A.A.s are sociable people, a factor that may have been partially responsible for their becoming alcoholics in the first place. As a consequence, meetings of local A.A. groups tend to be lively affairs.

A.A. as a fellowship has never developed any formal program of social activities for members, since the sole purpose of the movement is to help alcoholics get sober. In some areas, members, entirely on their own individual responsibility, have opened clubrooms or other facilities for members of the local group. These clubs are traditionally independent of A.A., and great care is usually taken to avoid direct identification with the movement.

Even where no club exists, it is not uncommon for local groups to arrange anniversary dinners, picnics, parties on New Year’s Eve and other special occasions, and similar affairs. In some large cities, A.A.s meet regularly for lunch and sponsor informal get-togethers over weekends.

**What do medical authorities think of A.A.?**

*Also see pamphlet: “A.A. as a Resource for the Health Care Professional”*

From its earliest days, A.A. has enjoyed the friendship and support of doctors who were familiar with its program of recovery from alcoholism. Doctors, perhaps better than any other group, are in a position to appreciate how unreliable other approaches to the problem of alcoholism have been in the past. A.A. has never been advanced as the only answer to the problem, but the A.A. recovery program has worked so often, after other methods have failed, that doctors today are frequently the most outspoken boosters for the program in their communities.

Some measure of the medical profession’s attitude toward A.A. was suggested in 1951 when the American Public Health Association named
Alcoholics Anonymous as one of the recipients of the famed Lasker Awards in “formal recognition of A.A.’s success in treating alcoholism as an illness and in blotting out its social stigma.”

A.A. is still new (or unknown) in some communities, and not all doctors are familiar with the recovery program. But here are excerpts from comments on A.A. by leading medical authorities:

In 1967, the American Medical Association stated that membership in A.A. was still the most effective means of treating alcoholism and quoted Dr. Ruth Fox, an eminent authority on alcoholism and then medical director of the National Council on Alcoholism: “With its thousands of groups and its 300,000 recovered alcoholics [now upwards of 2,000,000], A.A. has undoubtedly reached more cases than all the rest of us together. For patients who can and will accept it, A.A. may be the only form of therapy needed.”

“I have the utmost respect for the work A.A. is doing, for its spirit, for its essential philosophy of mutual helpfulness. I lose no opportunity to express my endorsement publicly and privately where it is of any concern.”

Karl Menninger, M.D.
Menninger Foundation

“Perhaps the most effective treatment in the rehabilitation of the alcoholic is a philosophy of living which is compatible with the individual and his family, an absorbing faith in himself which comes only after he has learned to understand himself, and a close association with others whose experiences parallel his own. The physician’s cooperation with Alcoholics Anonymous is one way of obtaining these things for his patient.”

Marvin A. Block, M.D., member of the American Medical Association’s Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence

What do religious leaders think of A.A.?

Also see pamphlet: “Members of the Clergy Ask About A.A.”

Probably no lay movement of modern times has been more richly endowed than A.A. with the support of the clergy of all the great faiths. Like
the doctors, mankind’s spiritual advisers have long been troubled by the problem of alcoholism. Many of these advisers have heard honest people make sincere pledges to abstain from alcohol they could not control — only to see them break those pledges within hours, days, or weeks. Sympathy, understanding, and appeals to conscience have been of little avail to the clergy in their attempts to help the alcoholic.

Thus it is perhaps not surprising that A.A. — although it offers a way of life rather than a way of formal religion — should be embraced so warmly by representatives of many different denominations. Here is how some of them have referred to A.A. in the past:

_The Directors Bulletin_, a Jesuit periodical published at St. Louis, Mo.

“Father Dowling of _The Queen’s Work_ staff had exceptional opportunity to observe the Alcoholics Anonymous movement.

“He found that the keystone of the A.A. therapy includes self-denial, humility, charity, good example, and opportunities for a new pattern of social recreation. All denominations are represented in the movement. Readers can be assured that no article or book on the movement is one-tenth as convincing as is personal contact with an individual or group of A.A.s whose personalities and homes and businesses have been transformed from chaos into sound achievement.”

_The Living Church_ (Episcopal)

“Basis of the technique of Alcoholics Anonymous is the truly Christian principle that a man cannot help himself except by helping others. The A.A. plan is described by the members themselves as ‘self-insurance.’ This self-insurance has resulted in the restoration of physical, mental, and spiritual health and self-respect to hundreds of men and women who would be hopelessly down-and-out without its unique but effective therapy.”

**Who is responsible for the publicity about A.A.?**

The A.A. tradition of public relations has always been keyed to attraction rather than promotion.
A.A. never seeks publicity but always cooperates fully with responsible representatives of press, radio, television, motion pictures, and other media that seek information about the recovery program.

At national and international levels, news of A.A. is made available by the Public Information Committee of the General Service Board. Local committees have also been organized to provide the media with facts about A.A. as a resource for alcoholics in their communities.

A.A. is deeply grateful to all its friends who have been responsible for the recognition accorded the movement. It is also deeply aware of the fact that the anonymity of members, upon which the program is so dependent, has been respected so faithfully by all media.

It should also be noted that within A.A., at A.A. meetings and among themselves, A.A. members are not anonymous.

**A New Way of Life**

A way of life cannot truly be described; it must be lived. Descriptive literature that relies upon broad, inspirational generalities is bound to leave many questions unanswered and many readers not fully satisfied that they have come upon the thing they need and seek. At the other extreme, a catalog of the mechanics and details of a program for living can portray only part of the value of such a program.

A.A. is a program for a new way of life without alcohol, a program that is working successfully for hundreds of thousands of men and women who approach it and apply it with honesty and sincerity. It is working throughout the world and for men and women in all stations and walks of life.

Perhaps this pamphlet has answered the main questions, spoken and unspoken, that you may have concerning A.A. Perhaps there are other questions that can be answered, as those in this pamphlet have been, solely on the basis of A.A. experience with the problem of alcoholism. If you have such questions, feel free to get in touch with an A.A. group in or near your community. Or write to General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 (website: aa.org).
A.A. PUBLICATIONS  Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400; Website: aa.org.

BOOKS
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
AS BILL SEES IT
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
‘PASS IT ON’

BOOKLETS
LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

PAMPHLETS
Experience, Strength and Hope:
WOMEN IN A.A.
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE “GOD” WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES — AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.; MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
MEMO TO AN INMATE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for inmates)

About A.A.:
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET’S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
A MEMBER’S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

VIDEOS (available on aa.org):
A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS

For Professionals:
A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS
AA GRAPEVINE (monthly)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish)
A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.’s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I am responsible…

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible.

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.
A Newcomer Asks

A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.
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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. 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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300M – 2/19 (DG3)
This leaflet is intended for people approaching Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) for the first time. In it we have tried to answer the questions most frequently in the minds of newcomers — the questions which were in our minds when we first approached the Fellowship.

Am I an alcoholic?
If you repeatedly drink more than you intend or want to, if you get into trouble, or if you have memory lapses when you drink, you may be an alcoholic.

Only you can decide. No one in A.A. will tell you whether you are or are not.

What can I do if I am worried about my drinking?
Seek help. Alcoholics Anonymous can help.

What is Alcoholics Anonymous?
We are a Fellowship of men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking and have found ourselves in various kinds of trouble as a result of drinking. We attempt — most of us successfully — to create a satisfying way of life without alcohol. For this we find we need the help and support of other alcoholics in A.A.

If I go to an A.A. meeting, does that commit me to anything?
No. A.A. does not keep membership files or attendance records. You do not have to reveal anything about yourself. No one will bother you if you don’t want to come back.

What happens if I meet people I know?
They will be there for the same reason you are there. They will not disclose your identity to outsiders. At A.A. you retain as much anonymity as you wish. That is one of the reasons we call ourselves Alcoholics Anonymous.

What happens at an A.A. meeting?
An A.A. meeting may take one of several forms, but at any meeting you will find alcoholics talking about what drinking did to their lives and personalities, what actions they took to help themselves, and how they are living their lives today.
**How can this help me with my drinking problem?**

We in A.A. know what it is like to be addicted to alcohol, and to be unable to keep promises made to others and ourselves that we will stop drinking. We are not professional therapists. Our only qualification for helping others to recover from alcoholism is that we have stopped drinking ourselves; and problem drinkers coming to us know that recovery is possible because they see people who have done it.

**Why do A.A.s keep on going to meetings after they are cured?**

We in A.A. believe there is no such thing as a cure for alcoholism. We can never return to normal drinking, and our ability to stay away from alcohol depends on maintaining our physical, mental, and spiritual health. This we can achieve by going to meetings regularly and putting into practice what we learn there. In addition, we find it helps us to stay sober if we help other alcoholics.

**How do I join A.A.?**

You are an A.A. member if and when you say so. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking, and many of us were not very wholehearted about that when we first approached A.A.

**How much does A.A. membership cost?**

There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership. An A.A. group will usually have a collection during the meeting to cover expenses, such as rent, coffee, etc., and to this all members are free to contribute as much or as little as they wish.

**Is A.A. a religious organization?**

No. Nor is it allied with any religious organization.

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

The majority of A.A. members believe that we have found the solution to our drinking problem not through individual willpower, but through a power greater than ourselves. However, everyone defines this power as he or she wishes. Many people call it God, others think it is the A.A. group, still others don’t believe in it at all. There is room in A.A. for people of all shades of belief and non-belief.
Can I bring my family to an A.A. meeting?
Family members or close friends are welcome at “Open” A.A. meetings. Discuss this with your local contact.

What advice do you give new members?
In our experience, the people who recover in A.A. are those who:

a) stay away from the first drink;
b) attend A.A. meetings regularly;
c) seek out the people in A.A. who have successfully stayed sober for some time;
d) try to put into practice the A.A. program of recovery;
e) obtain and study the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

How can I contact A.A.?
Look for Alcoholics Anonymous online or in your local telephone directory. These telephones are answered by A.A. volunteers who will be happy to answer your questions, or put you in touch with those who can. If there is no A.A. telephone service close to you, write or phone the A.A. General Service Office or visit our website at www.aa.org.

Here is a list of A.A. pamphlets which may be particularly helpful to you:
“Is There an Alcoholic in Your Life?”
“Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.”
“Is A.A. for You?”
“Do You Think You’re Different?”
“Women in A.A.”
“Young People and A.A.”
“Too Young?”

Remember that alcoholism is a progressive disease. Take it seriously, even if you feel you are only in the early stages of the illness. Alcoholism kills people. If you are an alcoholic, and if you continue to drink, in time you will get worse.
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 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. 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 A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., 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 A.A. 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.
A DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to A.A.’s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I am responsible…

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible.
Is A.A. for Me?

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www.aa.org
Is A.A. for me?

All of us in A.A. have asked this question.

We found out that many people had felt like us.

With the help of A.A. we tried to understand what alcohol had done to us. We were not alone. We could get help.

Answer each question yes or no. Yes answers will tell you if A.A. is for you.
Have I tried to stop drinking for a week or so but could not do it?

Yes □  No □
Most of us in A.A. made promises to ourselves or our families. We could not keep them. Then we came to Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. said, “Try not to drink today. If we do not drink today, we cannot get drunk today.”
Have I wished people would stop talking about my drinking?

Yes □  No □
In A.A. we do not tell anyone what to do. We talk about what we did. We talk about our drinking. We talk about how we stopped. We will help you if you want help.
Have I changed drinks to try not to get drunk?

Yes ☐  No ☐
We tried not to get drunk. We made our drinks weak. We just drank beer or wine, or we just drank on weekends. But if we drank anything with alcohol in it, we got drunk.
Do I ever need a drink to get going in the morning?

Yes ☐  No ☐
We found that if we needed a drink when we woke up, then we needed alcohol too much. If we need a drink to start the day, drinking is a problem.
Do I envy people who can drink without getting into trouble?

Yes ☐  No ☐
Other people seemed to be able to take it or leave it. We were different. We did not know why.
Does my drinking cause problems at home?

Yes ☐ No ☐
Before A.A. we thought people or problems at home caused our drinking. Now we know drinking made things worse at home.
Does my drinking cause problems with other people?

Yes ☐ No ☐
People treated us in a different way when we drank. They asked how much we had. We found that we lost friends when we drank.
Do I try to get extra drinks?
Yes ☐  No ☐
Sometimes we had a “few” drinks before we went out. There never seemed to be enough. Drinks never came as fast as we wanted them.
Have I tried to stop drinking but still got drunk?

Yes ☐  No ☐
We kidded ourselves that we could stop anytime. We learned that once we started to drink, we could not stop.
Have I missed work or cut school because of drinking?

Yes ☐ No ☐
We called in sick or told lies to get out of work or school. We were really hungover or drunk.
Do I have blackouts — times
I cannot remember?

Yes □  No □
In A.A. we learned that blackouts are a sign that we have a drinking problem.
Would my life be better if I quit drinking?

Yes ☐  No ☐
Many of us drank to make things better. But when we got to A.A., alcohol had taken over our lives.
How does it add up?
Is A.A. for you?

A.A. cannot take care of all your problems. But we can show you how to live one day at a time without alcohol. Many people have beat their drinking problem. Only you can decide if A.A. is for you. If your answer is yes, call us.
1. Have I tried to stop drinking for a week or so, but could not do it? ☐ ☐

2. Have I wished people would stop talking about my drinking? ☐ ☐

3. Have I changed drinks to try not to get drunk? ☐ ☐

4. Do I ever need a drink to get going in the morning? ☐ ☐

5. Do I envy people who can drink without getting into trouble? ☐ ☐

6. Does my drinking cause problems at home? ☐ ☐

7. Does my drinking cause problems with other people? ☐ ☐

8. Do I try to get extra drinks? ☐ ☐

9. Have I tried to stop drinking but still got drunk? ☐ ☐

10. Have I missed work or cut school because of drinking? ☐ ☐

11. Do I have blackouts — times I cannot remember? ☐ ☐

12. Would my life be better if I quit drinking? ☐ ☐
For more information look for “A.A.” or “Alcoholics Anonymous” in your local telephone book, online or write:

A.A. General Service Office
Box 459, Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
Telephone: (212) 870-3400
Website: www.aa.org
A.A. PUBLICATIONS  Below is a partial listing of  
A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from  
the General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS,  
Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.  
Telephone: (212) 870-3400; Website: aa.org.  

BOOKS  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS  
DAILY REFLECTIONS  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE  
AS BILL SEES IT  
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLD TIMERS  
‘PASS IT ON’  

BOOKLETS  
LIVING SOBER  
CAME TO BELIEVE  
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE  

PAMPHLETS  
Experience, Strength and Hope:  
WOMEN IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC  
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.  
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE  
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.  
THE “GOD” WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.  
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES — AND THEIR SPONSORS  
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS  
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES  
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?  
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY  
MEMO TO AN INMATE  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
(An illustrated pamphlet for inmates)  

About A.A.:  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.  
IS A.A. FOR ME?  
IS A.A. FOR YOU?  
A NEWCOMER ASKS  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?  
THIS IS A.A.  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP  
THE A.A. GROUP  
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL  
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS  
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX  
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED  
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES  
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS  
BRIDGING THE GAP  
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED  
LET’S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS  
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY  

For Professionals:  
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.  
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE  
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRinker in the workplace?  
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.  
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
A MEMBER’S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  

VIDEOS  
A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
A NEW FREEDOM  
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS  

For Professionals:  
A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS  

PERIODICALS  
AA GRAPEVINE (monthly)  
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish)
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I am responsible…

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And for that: I am responsible.

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.
What is A.A.?
Alcoholics Anonymous is a voluntary, worldwide fellowship of men and women from all walks of life who meet together to attain and maintain sobriety. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership.

Current Membership
It is estimated that there are over 120,000 groups and over 2,000,000 members in approximately 180 countries.

Relations with Outside Agencies
The Fellowship has adopted a policy of “cooperation but not affiliation” with other organizations concerned with the problem of alcoholism. We have no opinion on issues outside A.A. and neither endorse nor oppose any causes.

How A.A. Is Supported
Over the years, Alcoholics Anonymous has affirmed and strengthened a tradition of being fully self-supporting and of neither seeking nor accepting contributions from nonmembers. Within the Fellowship, the amount that may be contributed by any individual member is limited to $5,000 a year.

How A.A. Members Maintain Sobriety
A.A. is a program of total abstinence. Members simply stay away from one drink, one day at a time. Sobriety is maintained through sharing experience, strength and hope at group meetings and through the suggested Twelve Steps for recovery from alcoholism.

Why Alcoholics Anonymous Is “Anonymous”
Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of A.A. It disciplines the Fellowship to govern itself by principles rather than personalities. We are a society of peers. We strive to make known our program of recovery, not individuals who participate in the program. Anonymity in the public media is assurance to all A.A.s, especially to newcomers, that their A.A. membership will not be disclosed.
Anyone May Attend A.A. Open Meetings

Anyone may attend open meetings of A.A. These usually consist of talks by a leader and two or three speakers who share experience as it relates to their alcoholism and their recovery in A.A. Some meetings are held for the specific purpose of informing the nonalcoholic public about A.A. Doctors, members of the clergy, and public officials are invited. Closed discussion meetings are for alcoholics only.

How A.A. Started

A.A. was started in 1935 by a New York stockbroker and an Ohio surgeon (both now deceased) who had been “hopeless” drunks. They founded A.A. in an effort to help others who suffered from the disease of alcoholism and to stay sober themselves. A.A. grew with the formation of autonomous groups, first in the United States and then around the world.

How to Find A.A.

Look for Alcoholics Anonymous in any telephone directory, your local newspaper or “Find A.Â. Near You” on the home page of our website, www.aa.org. In most urban areas, a central A.A., office or intergroup, staffed mainly by volunteer A.A.s will be happy to answer your questions and/or put you in touch with those who can.

What A.A. Does Not Do

A.A. does not: Furnish initial motivation for alcoholics to recover… solicit members… engage in or sponsor research… keep attendance records or case histories… join “councils” or social agencies (although A.A. members, groups and service offices frequently cooperate with them)… follow up or try to control its members… make medical or psychological diagnoses or prognoses… provide detox, rehabilitation or nursing services, hospitalization, drugs, or any medical or psychiatric treatment… offer religious services or host/sponsor retreats… engage in education about alcohol… provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money, or any other welfare or social services… provide domestic or vocational counseling… accept any money for its services, or any contributions from non-A.A. sources… provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials, social agencies, employers, etc.

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature

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For further information on A.A., these pamphlets are available on request:
“A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous”;
“Frequently Asked Questions About A.A.”; “This is A.A.”

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Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163