

GUIDELINES FOR SPONSORS AND SPONSEES Tuesday 7 PM, Golden Valley, MN (HOW Format)

This document was written in committee and approved through group conscious of the OA Sunday, 7 PM St. Louis Park, MN (HOW Format) meeting to support all members who seek recovery, one day at a time. It has been adopted in its entirety without modification by the Tuesday night OA-HOW meeting. The guidelines represent what we have found useful in over a decade of working the HOW program of recovery.

The role of the sponsor is to guide their sponsee through the 12 Steps of recovery so that, through a spiritual awakening, they can achieve a personality change sufficient to provide them with a new way of living, one that is free from compulsive eating and food obsession. Working the steps maintains a sponsee's spiritual fitness, as defined in the Big Book on p. 85, thereby "shielding them against slips and negative thinking".

We take our abstinence very seriously, with the conviction that abstinence is the necessary stepping-stone to working the 12 steps. In our experience, the tools of the program have been critical to building the discipline necessary to put down the food and work the steps. We have found that the tools serve as powerful barriers to the behaviors that, in the past, have invited the thinking that drives us back to the food. We **practice the tools** as a method to keep these barriers effective. But we **work the 12 Steps** to experience freedom from the bondage of compulsive overeating.

Our OA and AA literature provides ample guidance on working the Steps and Traditions, therefore, the focus of this document is more on the tools. The lengthy discussion of the tools is intended to provide guidance for the sponsoring relationship and is not meant to convey that recovery is the result of using these tools. Our guidelines provide suggestions for newcomers, sponsors, and sponsees on using the tools of the program in order to work the 12 Steps of Overeaters Anonymous. Recovery is the promise of **working the 12 Steps** of Overeaters Anonymous.

We consider the relationship between a sponsor and a sponsee a sacred relationship. They work together so that each finds, or continues to have, recovery from compulsive eating behaviors and thoughts. The foundation of the relationship is trust. As a way to build trust within that relationship, we maintain a high level of confidentiality, using the tool and tradition of anonymity.

Sponsoring involves several responsibilities:

1. Providing support to the sponsee in working the 12 steps of the program.
2. Modeling the use of the 12 Steps & 12 Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous.
3. Encouraging the use of the tools of the program as a means to a discipline which keeps us connected to one another and abstinent.
4. Listening to the sponsee's experience with love, compassion, encouragement, and honesty while sharing your own experience.
5. Upholding the integrity of the HOW format.

Each sponsor and sponsee is responsible for honoring this relationship and identifying obstacles to its effectiveness. In this document, we encourage sponsors and sponsees to speak with other sponsors prior to making big decisions, including a decision to change sponsors or release a sponsee. However, at any time, a sponsor or sponsee is free to communicate the decision to discontinue the sponsor-sponsee relationship.

These guidelines contain a section on the Sponsoring Tool. They are intended to guide even the newest sponsor to building effective sponsoring relationships. No guidelines can answer every question that arises in the course of living. We therefore rely on the relationships we build with other sponsors to seek support. The central message we want to convey is that **it is within the context of the sponsor-sponsee relationship that the exact parameters of abstinence is defined and evolves.**

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As our recovery evolves, so will our perspectives on how we best use the tools and the 12 steps to achieve and maintain our freedom from compulsive eating. Consequently, these guidelines capture our collective thinking at this point in our group's history. Though we have attempted to address issues and questions we've heard over the years, there will, no doubt, be more questions and different answers as our recoveries progress. This is the main reason we suggest that **the ultimate guidance for decisions regarding the practice of these tools and the working of the steps emerge from within the sacred sponsor-sponsee relationship.**

The authors of these guidelines share the conviction that the OA HOW format can thrive if we allow our experience in recovery to evolve. The use of the group conscience as a means to evaluate what is effective in our fellowship has guided us in that evolution. The tools of our program are meant to provide clarity. The clarity is critical to defining and maintaining our abstinence. Further, we believe that to avoid stagnation within our fellowship, there must be room for our understanding and practices to evolve.

Many of us have experienced a transition from seeing the tools as a set of rules and restrictions to a discipline focused on behaviors that shift our emphasis from food and food thoughts to peace of mind. Over time, we have come to experience the flexibility of working this program under any circumstance. We have come to appreciate that an open and honest relationship between a sponsor and a sponsee can assure that we maintain the accountability so many of us have found critical to long-term abstinence. We continually grow in our understanding of surrender and trust that we can do together what we have never been able to do alone.

TOOLS OF RECOVERY

ACTION PLAN TOOL

"An action plan is the process of identifying and implementing attainable actions, both daily and long-term, that are necessary to support our individual abstinence and emotional, spiritual and physical recovery." (OA World Service Office, WSO)

In OA HOW, we have a shared action plan which includes the practice of each of the other tools. With the exception of meetings, which are weekly, we practice each of these tools on a daily basis.

SPONSORSHIP TOOL

Sponsors

- **Set a time for a daily call with their sponsee(s):** Sponsors commit to being available for the daily call, at which time they listen to the sponsee's food plan for the day and listen to the sponsee's written assignment.
- **Work to establish trust:** Many sponsors have learned that being clear and compassionate, without alarm, rigidity or a harsh tone is effective for helping a sponsee. We have found that this approach builds rapport and creates an atmosphere where problem solving can happen.
- **Help newcomers through the 12 Steps:** Within the limits of personal experience and knowledge, a sponsor seeks to help a newcomer through the 12 Steps. Sponsors demonstrate support for new members by sharing understanding, patience and willingness to devote the necessary time and effort to be of service.
- **Help sponsee(s) navigate:** Sponsors may share their personal experience, strength, and hope, but do not impose personal views, spiritual practices or their individualized food plan on their sponsees. In circumstances where a sponsee may need professional guidance (e.g., from mental health, legal, medical or social work communities) a sponsor does not take on the role of the professional. A sponsor may suggest a sponsee seek professional help or consider another 12 Step program.

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- **Provide guidance:** Sponsors provide guidance on daily reading and writing assignments. The Sponsor Box has several question sets that may be useful for sponsees. Sponsors are encouraged to get feedback from sponsees which can guide them in suggested reading and writing assignments.
- **Assist Step work:** As conflicts, restlessness, irritability, discontentment, resentment, and fear arise for a sponsee, it is often useful to refer them back to Steps 4 through 9. The Big Book process for working through resentments and fears is outlined in the "Into Action" chapter in the AA Big Book. Resentment, Fear and Sexual Conduct forms can be found in the Step 4 Packet in the Sponsor Box.
- **Educate and support:** A sponsee may struggle in the recovery process – we remind ourselves sponsoring is a privilege and should always be done in a positive and encouraging manner. If a sponsee; isn't prepared, is late, misses call times, doesn't make all their telephone calls, experiences unusual personal problems, struggles with their abstinence or daily commitments, we continue to educate them why the disciplines of working the HOW program are important. We don't arbitrarily terminate this trusted relationship. We help each other by carrying the message and living the 12 steps. Our program requires dedication, honesty and desperation - sponsees will withdraw through their own decision if they are not ready. Sponsors give members every opportunity to succeed.

TIPS:

Sponsors

Listen for your sponsee's growth and progress and share your observations with them.

- **Support** your sponsee with a plan for special circumstances. (*See suggestions in Plan of Eating*). This may be a time when it is helpful for you to get support from other sponsors for circumstances with which you are less familiar. Sponsors frequently reach out to other sponsors for input and we strongly encourage sponsees to do the same.
- **Be a role model**, actively participate in group service needs, for your individual meeting(s) as well as the greater OA fellowship.
- **Discuss** the benefits of service and the role it plays in ongoing recovery in OA and encourage your sponsee to take on some form of direct service for their home meeting.
- **Encourage** your sponsee to occasionally pitch at their home meeting, perhaps sharing something they wrote in an earlier assignment.
- **If a sponsee is continually struggling** to complete the first 80 days of assignments, due to food plan "slips", you may consider asking the sponsee to work steps 4 and 5 simultaneously with the first 80 days of assignments. It is sometimes necessary to move up the timeline to do steps 4 through 9. In order to support their recovery, a sponsee may need to address resentments and fears sooner rather than later. Continually redoing assignments related to Steps 1-3 may not be the best way to help them find recovery.

Sponsees

Call your sponsor every day at agreed upon time and be prepared with:

1. Written food plan for the upcoming day.
 2. Reading and writing assignment.
- **Raise** any issues about following your committed food plan, e.g., *traveling, eating at restaurants, eating at others' homes, business events, and situations where food preparation or a meal may be interrupted*. In this way, you and your sponsor can develop plans for handling them.
 - **Changing committed food:** Sponsees commit a complete food plan for the day and are discouraged from making changes on a whim. When changes are required follow the plan you and your sponsor agree on, for example, with a simple change you might first call your sponsor and if they're unavailable, leave a message on voicemail. You might then agree that to complete the change you further call two other sponsors in an attempt to make the change with a "live" person. If none is available, leave voicemails and make the change.

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If a food change involves more than a straight substitution, sponsee typically keep calling until a live sponsor is reached-- that sponsor will provide direction. The goal is to take the decision “out of our heads”, thereby eliminating the “monkey chatter” so many of us have experienced when dealing with food choices.

There will be rare circumstances where a sponsee is unable to reach a sponsor. Sponsors and sponsees are encouraged to discuss what to do in those situations.

Example: After trying to reach another sponsor for x minutes or xx calls, share a decision about what you will do with another person (e.g., the person you are with or write it down on a piece of paper). A helpful question to ask in times like this is, “Will my decision reflect an intent to stay within my food plan (i.e., prevent compulsive eating)?” Make sure the answer is yes before proceeding.

Slips:

We define a “slip” in abstinence as the willful, conscious decision to deviate from our committed food plan without first consulting a sponsor. Therefore, in order to have a slip, the decision must be both conscious and willful. **Mistakes** do not fit that definition. Mistakes are inevitable, slips are not. We share our mistakes with our sponsors as we identify them. Make sure both sponsor and sponsee are clear on the expectation for communicating a mistake. Failures to follow the other tools of the program are significant red flags which deserve discussion in the sponsoring relationship, but they are not “slips” which define a break in abstinence.

If there is a disagreement between the sponsor and the sponsee on whether or not there has been a slip, we encourage both the sponsor and the sponsee to independently connect with other sponsors to get their input. As sponsors, we continually avoid “playing God” and often find the connection to members in our network helpful when a sponsee is stressed by a potential loss of abstinence.

Step-Ups

Step-ups are celebrated when a sponsee has completed at least 80 days of abstinence and 80 days of assignments, which signifies completion of the first three Steps of the program.

- **Private Step Up:**
 - Prior to stepping up at a meeting, a sponsee will meet (in person or via phone) with their sponsor for a private step up. The outline for the ceremony can be found in the Sponsor Box. At that time, the sponsor will share the process of how the meeting step up ceremony works. This may be a time to introduce the process of completing the 4th step inventory, which the sponsee is encouraged to begin immediately following the step-up.
 - Once the private ceremony is complete, a sponsee is officially available to sponsor. The sponsor asks the sponsee to contact the calendar person at least 2 weeks prior to stepping up so it is announced at the home group meeting.
 - Many newcomers are reluctant to step up, convinced they are not yet ready to sponsor. This is a good time to assure them that we do not sponsor alone, share our mistakes as a sponsor, and assure them they will get more from sponsoring than they can imagine.
- **Meeting Step Up:**
 - At the meeting Step Up, the new sponsor will select a tool on which to pitch. The sponsee will also join the sponsor line and will share: how long they have been in OA/HOW, total length of time abstinent and how much weight lost or gained.
 - The new sponsor is now expected to have an opening for at least one sponsee and may mark their availability in the “Comments” section of the We Care Book. Ideally, the new sponsor will work with someone less experienced.

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PLAN OF EATING

- New sponsees get a food plan from a nutritionist, dietician, or doctor. It should include:
 - Food exchanges/serving size
 - Meal plan broken down by meal
 - Any omissions or specific food items and instructions

The sponsee discusses the food plan with their sponsor. The sponsor does not serve as a nutritionist, but simply checks to make sure that the plan is clear and easy to follow and that it corresponds with our Plan of Eating tool (e.g., no alcohol, sugar 5th and beyond, etc.).

If a newcomer wants to start and is unable to get an immediate appointment with a nutritionist, doctor or dietician, the sponsor may offer options, including:

- Use the “Dignity of Choice” pamphlet from World Service and ask the sponsee to choose one of those plans until they complete the appointment.
- Share the sponsor’s food plan for temporary use. It is important that we avoid imposing the sponsor’s food plan on the sponsee, both to avoid the impression that we are a “diet and calories” club and to respect that food plans are specific to individual needs. What may be effective for one person could be ineffective, even dangerous, for another.

We emphasize the importance of building a rigorous discipline regarding food plans and food changes. The discipline becomes habit and most have found it a source of freedom from the “monkey chatter” that characterized our days of compulsive eating. We maintain this disciplined approach to our food plan, no matter how long we’ve been in the program. However, after a lengthy period of abstinence and careful and honest discussion with our sponsors, we might build some minor variations into our food plan, including optional uses of certain condiments, some methods of dealing with “combination” foods, methods of communicating a change, ways of handling eating away from home, etc. No matter how small these plan of eating changes might seem, we consult with our sponsor prior to taking any action.

Special Situations: Despite suggestions we make here, we encourage a discussion between the sponsor and sponsee which will protect the sponsee’s abstinence, allowing the sponsee to surrender the decision around food. There are any number of challenges members will encounter that necessitate a flexible eating plan, e.g., illness, injuries, travel, eating at restaurants, unusual working conditions. It is within the relationship of the sponsor and sponsee that one comes to agreement about how challenges will be handled. Below are suggestions for consideration.

- Restaurants or Work/Business Engagements involving food
 - If possible, have a choice in the restaurant. Go to the website and check the menu to see if abstinent foods are available.
 - At some restaurants you can call ahead and talk to the chef. Discuss your food restrictions and ask if they are willing to weigh food in the kitchen. When you arrive, alert the server to your special request.
 - Practice using the scale, it gets easier with practice.
 - There may be times when other ways of measuring your food may be required or necessary. Sponsees can work with their sponsor to have an agreed upon plan for these situations. Alternate measures may include: protein serving the size of a deck of cards or palm of your hand; a baked potato or apple the size of a tennis ball, etc.
 - Pack some “back-ups” to ease handling surprises.
 - Choose to eat before or after the event and just enjoy a good cup of tea or coffee

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- Eating at another person's home
 - Call host ahead of the visit and explain that you have some food allergies that restrict what you can eat. You do not want to impose a hardship on the food preparation, but would like to join in the meal if it works for you. Then ask for the menu. Let the host know what will work for you and make some arrangements (e.g., come to the kitchen shortly before serving and get your salad before it is dressed, or potatoes before butter is added, etc.)
 - If there is not a way to eat what is being served, make other plans like: bringing your own food, eating before the event, or bringing portions of the meal that you may need.
 - Work with your sponsor to develop a workable plan that will not impose undue hardship on your host

ANONYMITY

Within our fellowship, we have a strong focus on "Principles before Personalities" which means that we maintain a high degree of confidentiality in our communication.

- We do not share the names of our sponsors or sponsees, we do not share the names of fellows who are not present in a conversation. We do not tell another's story.
- We can share the message that we hear at meetings or on a call, but do not disclose the name or other identifying information of the person who shared the message.
- Anonymity should NOT limit our effectiveness within the fellowship. We are careful to avoid "telling other people's stories for them" but sharing that a fellow has lost a parent or just had a child or has been quite ill, simply gives our fellowship a chance to offer support. If there is concern for breaking someone's anonymity, we recommend checking with the person for assurance to share information.
- Referring sponsees to other fellows for assistance, insight or specific help can be done by sharing the names without the details.
- Sharing an upcoming Anniversary or Step Up with other members is not a break in anonymity -- this is service within our fellowship.

MEETINGS

- HOW members attend at least one OA HOW Format meeting a week.
- We encourage everyone to have a home meeting. A home group helps establish relationships with other OA members, and becomes a focal point for service, an integral part of our recovery.
- As a member of a home a group, we are encouraged to participate in group business meetings, inventories, etc., in order to maintain the health of the group.
- Anyone can share or pitch during open sharing at the end of the meeting. It is suggested that the sharing be positive and focused on the solution.
- We continue the practice of requiring that an individual become a HOW sponsor in order to lead a meeting, share a tool, or serve as the 20-minute speaker. This is not to exclude those who are struggling, but to offer hope to those who need to hear positive experience.
- Because sponsors lead the meeting, serve as speakers for the 20-minute talk, and pitch on the tools, we encourage sponsors to "give way" to newer members who are not yet sponsors during open sharing.

TELEPHONE

- Each day we make a live connection with at least 3 other OA members, in addition to our sponsors, by phone.

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- A completed call counts as one for the caller as well as one for the receiver.
- Newcomers are encouraged to focus on connecting with members working the HOW format so they can get support with working a uniquely structured program. In time, they may wish to expand their network of OA support to include those working other OA formats. Newcomers are encouraged to ask questions to learn how others live life in recovery.
- Our calls:
 - Deepen our understanding of the program, help us identify with fellow members, and decrease the isolation that characterizes our addiction.
 - Help us learn how to more easily reach out for help as we learn to comfortably live without compulsive overeating.
 - Offer a chance to genuinely listen to others and practice speaking honestly.
 - Teach us to be of service to others and to accept the help others have to offer.
 - Provide a supportive network of people who know us well. To ensure a robust network, members are encouraged to develop a range of connections, i.e., fellows varying lengths of time in the program, fellows who are available at different times of day or live in a different geographical location.

Tips for Special Circumstances

- Sponsors and sponsees are encouraged to devise a plan prior to the special circumstance, if at all possible.
- When traveling to places that have very limited or no phone service, consider writing postcards to at least three other members per day, or write emails that will be sent as soon as a connection is available.
- When engaged in activities with other OA fellows, such as coffee/ lunch/ parties, OA Convention, regional and world service, discuss handling phone expectations with your sponsor/sponsee.

LITERATURE AND WRITING

The HOW concept includes a daily reading and writing assignment. We share what we have written with our sponsor during our daily call.

- Initially, we study the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, another AA book. The sponsor will provide the sponsee a reading assignment and a question on which to reflect and write.
- The first 80 days of assignments take the sponsee through steps 1, 2, and 3. The sponsor will guide the sponsee through the subsequent steps according to the Big Book.
- After completing Step 9, the sponsee will add a daily reflection/inventory and is encouraged to share it with their sponsor. The outline on pages 86 & 87 of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous may be used as a daily guide.
- Once we have worked through steps 1- 9, we work with our sponsor to agree to a daily reading assignment and written reflection. For example, we may read from other AA & OA literature, or literature oriented towards the sponsee's recovery.
- As resentments, fears, and relationship issues occur, we encourage use of the inventory process of Steps 4-9. We look at our character defects (selfishness, self-seeking, fear, and dishonesty as defined in the Big Book), and we discuss them with our sponsor. Issues can be effectively captured through the Big Book defined forms.

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SERVICE

Service is fundamental for our recovery and may well begin within the context of the sponsor/sponsee relationship. Service through sponsorship is meant to be mutually beneficial, strengthening the recovery of both sponsor and sponsee.

- A sponsor is encouraged to ask both new and long-term sponsees to join group activities. A good place to start is at one's home meeting.
- Involvement provides a picture of the scope of OA to the newcomer and provides the structure and support to continue the future of OA. Immediate opportunities might include:
 - Cleaning up after meetings,
 - Attending business (group conscience) meetings,
 - Arriving early to help set up,
 - Greeting people as they arrive
 - For a sponsee reluctant to make phone calls a sponsor may note that phone calls are also a way to serve others,
 - Encourage your sponsee to add to their home meeting by taking a reading when asked and occasionally volunteer to take a reading.
 - Sponsors encourage their newcomer sponsees to pitch during the time to share. (For example, reading a written assignment, sharing on a vacation or holiday activity or how they have incorporated the program into their life.)

The act of sharing makes it easier for a member to live without food and offers the satisfaction that comes from assuming responsibility for someone other than self. In recovery, service becomes a key component of improved or enhanced relationships. This is often best done by stressing the spiritual nature of service work and by pointing out the usefulness of simple footwork and faith

- A sponsor is encouraged to impart the pleasure of involvement in the work of Overeaters Anonymous and to model that engagement by also embracing service.
- A sponsor is encouraged to ask both new and long-term sponsees to join group activities.
- Involvement provides a picture of the scope of OA to the newcomer and provides the structure and support to continue the future of OA.
- All OA members are encouraged to offer service to the greater fellowship by taking an active part in regional and national activities. Individuals may consider seeking election to committee positions and attend OA sponsored events such as workshops, studies, retreats, and conventions.