A BRIEF GUIDE TO ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

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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A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholism is recognized as a major health problem. In the U.S., it is the third greatest killer, after heart disease and cancer — and it does not damage alcoholics alone. Others are hurt by its effects — in the home, on the job, on the highway. Alcoholism costs the community millions of dollars every year. So whether or not you ever become an alcoholic yourself, alcoholism still can have an impact on your life.

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

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

What is alcoholism?

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

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

What are the symptoms?

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fail to eat and become malnourished; get cirrhosis of the liver; shake violently, hallucinate, or have convulsions when withdrawn from liquor.

What is A.A.?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who help each other to stay

sober. They offer the same help to anyone who has a drinking problem and wants to do something about it. Since they are all alcoholics themselves, they have a special understanding of each other. They know what the illness feels like — and they have learned how to recover from it in A.A.

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

How does A.A. help the alcoholic?

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

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

To be in touch with other members and to learn about the recovery program, new members go to A.A. meetings regularly.

What are A.A. meetings?

Alcoholics Anonymous is established in approximately 170 countries. The people in each group get together, usually once or twice a week, to hold A.A. meetings, of two main types:

(1) At "open meetings," speakers tell how they drank, how they discovered A.A., and how its program has helped them. Members may bring relatives or friends, and usually anyone interested in A.A. is also welcome to attend "open meetings."

(2) "Closed meetings" are for alcoholics only. These are group discussions, and any members who want to may speak up, to ask questions and to share their thoughts with fellow members. At "closed meetings," A.A.s can get help with personal problems in staying sober and in everyday living. Some other A.A.s can explain how they have already handled the same problems — often by using one or more of the Twelve Steps.

Who belongs to A.A.?

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

A.A. does not keep a list of members, but groups do report how many people belong to each one. From these reports, total A.A. membership is estimated at over 2,000,000.

Does an alcoholic have to go "all the way down" before A.A. can help?

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

Are there any young people in A.A.?

The pamphlet "Young People and A.A." gives the personal stories of ten who joined when they were under 30. The cartoon pamphlets "Too Young?" and "A Message to Teenagers" tell how some teenage alcoholics found A.A. Many young people like these are cheerfully staying sober and taking part in A.A. activities.

Who runs A.A.?

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

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

(1) Groups in the same area set up a central office or "intergroup" office.

(2) Groups everywhere share their experiences by writing to the A.A. General Service Office, in New York City.

(3) Groups in the U.S. and Canada choose representatives to go to the A.A. General Service Conference, held once a year.

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

What does it cost to belong to A.A.?

Newcomers do not pay any fees for membership. And members do not pay dues.

But money *is* needed for some purposes: renting the meeting hall, buying coffee and other

refreshments, buying A.A. books, pamphlets, and magazines. So a basket is usually passed around during the meeting, and members put in whatever they can afford or wish to give. Groups also contribute money to support central offices, the General Service Office, and other A.A. activities.

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

What can the families of alcoholics do?

A.A. is just for the alcoholics, but two other fellowships can help their relatives. One is Al-Anon Family Groups. The other is Alateen, for teenagers who have alcoholic parents.

What does A.A. NOT do?

1. A.A. does *not* run membership drives to try to argue alcoholics into joining. A.A. is for alcoholics who *want* to get sober.

2. A.A. does *not* check up on its members to see that they don't drink. It helps alcoholics to help *themselves*.

3. A.A. is *not* a religious organization. All members are free to decide on their own personal ideas about the meaning of life.

4. A.A. is *not* a medical organization, does *not* give out medicines or psychiatric advice.

5. A.A. does *not* run any hospitals, wards, or sanitariums or provide nursing services.

6. A.A. is *not connected* with any other organization. But A.A. does cooperate with organizations that fight alcoholism. Some members work for such organizations — but on their own — *not* as representatives of A.A.

7. A.A. does *not* accept money from sources outside A.A., either private or government.

8. A.A. does *not* offer any social services, does *not* provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, or

money. It helps alcoholics stay sober, so they can earn these things for themselves.

9. Alcoholics Anonymous lives up to the "Anonymous" part of its title. It does *not* want members' full names or faces to be revealed on radio, TV, newspapers or on new media technologies such as the Internet. And members do not tell other members' names to people outside A.A. But members are *not* ashamed of belonging to A.A. They just want to encourage more alcoholics to come to A.A. for help. And they do *not* want to make heroes and heroines of themselves simply for taking care of their own health.

10. A.A. does *not* provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials, social agencies, employers, etc.

How can you find out more about A.A.?

1. Most towns and cities have an A.A. listing in the telephone book, for a group or central office. Often, local A.A. has a public information committee to tell people what they want to know about A.A.

2. If you do not find an A.A. listing in your phone book, write to:

General Service Office
Box 459, Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

3. You can get other A.A. pamphlets either from your town's A.A. office or by writing to the General Service Office (address above), which will send you free *one* copy of each pamphlet you want. Some titles are:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE and

IT HAPPENED TO ALICE
(two A.A. stories told in cartoon form)

TOO YOUNG? (cartoon pamphlet for teenagers)

A MESSAGE TO TEENAGERS
(short version of the above)

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?

A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC

THIS IS A.A.

IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?

IS A.A. FOR YOU?

THE A.A. MEMBER — MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS

4. In local libraries, you may find copies of these A.A. books:

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS

AS BILL SEES IT

DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS

"PASS IT ON"

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

5. The A.A. Grapevine (monthly magazine) may be obtained from your local A.A. office or by writing for information to:

Box 1980
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

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 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.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Complete order forms available from General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS *(regular, portable, large-print and abridged pocket editions)*
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
(regular, soft-cover, large-print, pocket and gift editions)
EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE
AS BILL SEES IT *(regular & soft cover editions)*
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
"PASS IT ON"
DAILY REFLECTIONS

BOOKLETS

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

PAMPHLETS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.
THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
IS A.A. FOR ME?
THIS IS A.A.
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
A.A. FOR THE WOMAN
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE
THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
INSIDE A.A.
THE A.A. GROUP
G.S.R.
MEMO TO AN INMATE
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY
THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
A NEWCOMER ASKS
WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE
(Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets)
TOO YOUNG? *(A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers)*
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An Illustrated pamphlet for inmates)

DVDs

A.A.—AN INSIDE VIEW
A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS
YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE, THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

PERIODICALS

A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

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.

P-42