

# Are You New to 12-Step Programs?

If you are new to 12-Step programs you may find the ideas you hear about in meetings and see in our publications a bit daunting, and perhaps unattainable. Most of the rest of us felt the same way! Here are some ideas that helped us “keep coming back” and overcome some initial barriers to recovery:

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

# Sponsorship in EDA

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

Carrying the message of recovery reinforces gratitude, solidifies new habits of thought and action, and fills us with purpose and joy. Sponsorship is a fundamental and vital component of Step Twelve: it is carrying the message of recovery in the most immediate, direct and meaningful way possible.

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## In EDA, a sponsor:

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

If you have applied the Twelve Steps to your eating disorder and have found peace and freedom with yourself, with food, with your body, and with others, your recovery will flourish and your happiness will grow as you help others grapple with their impediments. Please contact [sponsors@eatingdisordersanonymous.org](mailto:sponsors@eatingdisordersanonymous.org) if you are able to sponsor someone working the Steps of EDA.

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## In EDA, a sponsee:

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

Although sponsees often develop strong and durable bonds with their sponsors, the relationship is not one that should be expected to extend beyond the context of working the Steps.

Each sponsee should work to build his or her own network of friends in recovery. We encourage everyone who has made it through Step Three to consciously practice reliance on their Higher Power or higher purpose, rather than depending too heavily on individual people to see them through life challenges.

Each sponsee is responsible for his or her own recovery. Switching sponsors is allowed, however, it is important to accept and work with what life presents to us as best we can, searching for positives. We take what we can use and leave the rest.

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



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## *Sponsorship in EDA*

For more information please visit our website at:

[www.4EDA.org](http://www.4EDA.org)

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