

FAMILIES

ANONYMOUS

AND

SPONSORSHIP

FOREWORD

We usually come to our first Families Anonymous meeting with the hope of changing someone else. Those who stay find a Twelve-Step Programme that helps them change *themselves* and achieve some measure of serenity. Many find The Twelve-Step Programme difficult to understand alone and look for a person to help them learn to use it in all areas of their lives. This person is referred to as a *Sponsor*.

There is no one way to get or find an FA Sponsor or to be one. This pamphlet is meant only to present ideas for your consideration.

Some people have expressed doubts about their ability to be a Sponsor, but many find that it can be a warm, growing, and satisfying part of their involvement in the FA Programme.

But **a Sponsor**, no matter how helpful, **is no substitute for attending meetings**. Relying only on a Sponsor is a disservice to oneself.

Sponsorship is caring and offering friendship. By no means do we wish to infer a teacher-to-student kind of relationship. These guidelines were compiled from many members' input. If the ideas expressed here stimulate you and/or your group to develop your own ideas about Sponsorship, we hope you will share them with the fellowship through the UK Service Office.

Your group may wish to have a meeting on this subject and develop a list of people willing to serve as Sponsors.

YOU KEEP ONLY WHAT YOU GIVE AWAY

WHAT IS A SPONSOR?

**"A Sponsor is someone who can bear the burden
of another's problems and not give advice."**

Father Terry

A Sponsor is a Families Anonymous member who will help you understand the Twelve-Step Programme. Ideally, he or she is someone who has been in the Programme long enough to have studied all the Steps. A member might feel more qualified if he or she has worked Steps Four and Five. Your group may have an attendance sheet that shows who feels qualified or willing to be a Sponsor. A member may also ask someone in another FA group to be his or her Sponsor.

A Sponsor is someone you can call when you are confused or depressed, or when you have good news to share. A Sponsor does not give advice, but does share his or her experience, strength, and hope. By talking with someone who does not have your emotional involvement in a given situation, you learn to identify your feelings and motives, and distinguish between "mountains" and "molehills". When you ask for ideas and suggestions, you'll feel more confident about your choices.

Newcomers especially need Sponsors, but it's never too late to ask someone for help with the Programme. This guide is for the *new* as well as *experienced* member who wishes to seek a Sponsor.

HOW TO CHOOSE A SPONSOR

Sponsorship is about friendship. It's about being healthy enough to reach out in a positive way to ask for help to understand the Programme. The time to get or find a Sponsor is when you feel you need one. Some people are ready as soon as they realise their lives are *unmanageable*. Others may take weeks or months before they are ready to seek out this special relationship.

At first, you may call any member whose name and phone number are on the phone list. Take two or three numbers. If one number is busy, call the next. You may soon realise that you are calling one person more than anyone else, and this person may be the one you choose for your Sponsor.

After listening to members share with the group, you can judge which member you would like to have for a Sponsor; someone you can talk to and who seems to share some of your experiences. *Asking this person to Sponsor you is a part of your recovery.* Spiritual growth sometimes starts with admitting you need help. Being too shy or too proud could mean that your feelings of helplessness and loneliness may continue indefinitely.

While searching for a Sponsor it helps to attend as many meetings as possible. You'll soon recognise those members who are committed to using the Programme in their lives. Remember, these members were once newcomers too, but they tried working the FA Programme to deal with problems similar to yours.

Sometimes a person seems so serene that you are drawn to him or her, and you want some of what he or she has. Sometimes it's someone who shares good ideas in group discussions, or who seems to have a positive attitude. It's often someone who has lived through some very painful times and yet found serenity and recovery in the Programme. He or she probably seems to have solutions, but Sponsors are not perfect people - only willing ones.

HOW TO REQUEST A SPONSOR

Usually, asking someone to be your Sponsor is done in a private conversation. You may wish to offer some reasons for your choice, such as:

"I usually hear something I need to hear when you are at a meeting" or "I feel you can help me grow and grasp the Programme."

If the person feels able, he or she will probably be honoured to sponsor you. But don't take offence if the person declines. He or she may not feel as strong as you perceive him or her to be, or may already be in a sponsoring relationship.

HOW TO WORK WITH A SPONSOR

Ask your Sponsor when the best times would be to call or get together. Learn to listen. Be ready for, and welcome, constructive criticism. You have asked for help, so try to avoid saying "Yes but..." You know what has worked or not worked in your situation. A Sponsor is someone who can suggest new ways of dealing with your problems, while encouraging you to continue using ways you have already found to be effective. At the same time, your Sponsor may be a good listener who hears your feelings and helps lower your emotional "temperature".

Ask your Sponsor to help you discover *your weaknesses and strengths*. Try to follow any suggestions your Sponsor gives you, even though they may seem pointless to you. For example, you may be asked to write about the Steps. You may be asked to write a Fourth-Step inventory when you are ready. Try not to feel threatened as if a teacher is going to grade your writing. Most of your writing will be for your eyes only. Writing is merely one way to help you think more clearly. You'll probably do this and other Steps more than once as you grow in the FA Programme.

If you ever "outgrow" your Sponsor, it's acceptable to end the relationship and look for a new Sponsor more in tune with your progress. This may just evolve, or you may want to say something like "You've taught me a lot and I appreciate all you've done for me. Now I think I need some new input." or "John will be tougher on me which am just what I need right now to help me grow." These changes usually just happen rather naturally, because FA people learn to express their true feelings in a loving way.

Something important to remember is that **guidance from your Sponsor is not a substitute for attending meetings** where you are exposed to many viewpoints. Your Sponsor's serenity has been achieved by working the Twelve Steps of the FA Programme to relieve the anguish of the family disease of addiction. He or she will try to pass this serenity on to you, but no one person will have all the answers to all your questions and, as you keep coming back; you will give back the strength that's been given to you.

BEING A SPONSOR

Accepting the responsibility of Sponsorship may be the most important step you will take in FA. In many ways you will be doing more for yourself than for your Sponsee. As you help another learn to work the Twelve Steps, your own understanding of the Programme will also grow. The more you have studied and worked the Steps, the more you will feel qualified for this task.

Establishing Rapport and Ways of Working Together

There is no correct way to be a Sponsor. These are only suggestions. Some Sponsors are *directive*; that is, they ask a Sponsee to do certain things, such as write about their feelings. Other Sponsors are *non-directive*, allowing the Sponsee to take more initiative. It will depend mostly on how you perceive your Sponsee's needs. If you remain flexible and relaxed, with the Programme foremost in mind, most of the people you sponsor will grow. You're bound to have a few relationships not work out, but these are opportunities for you to *let go*.

If a person asks you to be their Sponsor, and you are willing, thank them and agree on how you will work together. You will need to:

1. Let your Sponsee know your schedule and the best times to reach you.
2. Discuss emergency calls. Are you willing to receive midnight calls, knowing your Sponsee will make them only in dire circumstances? Can you be contacted at work? Only you can decide these matters and you have a right and *responsibility* to set limits. Open and frank honesty are a must.
3. Decide when and where you will meet, such as before or after meetings or an afternoon in the park.

Lead Without Dominating

The more you sponsor, the sooner you will learn to lead without dominating or giving advice. *The greatest gift you will give is the act of listening.* Ask questions like:

“Do you have any questions?”

“Does this make sense to you?”

“Have you found ways to apply the Steps to your relationships outside the family?”

“Have you examined your motive, your *real* motive?”

“How did that make you feel?”

Encourage your Sponsee to read Families Anonymous literature, especially *Helping, The Twelve Steps*, and to use the *Twelve-Step Workbook*. Help him or her see how the Steps can be used in all aspects of life. The Twelve Steps are not exclusively for dealing with troubled loved ones.

SUGGESTIONS

Emphasise the importance of showing love and concern for the Sponsee's loved one. Many newcomers are filled with frustration, anger, and hate toward their loved one. They need help to dissipate these negative feelings, and it helps to know that hateful behaviour is a symptom of both *their* disease and *ours*. "Hate the action, not the person." We are all victims, and the path toward loving others is in forgiving and loving ourselves. This takes time.

After the Sponsee has attended six or more meetings, suggest the purchase of a small notebook or, better yet, the *Twelve-Step Workbook*, a ring binder, and paper. Have your Sponsee start out by answering questions or just writing about reactions, feelings, and their understanding of the first three steps, *one at a time*. Assure the Sponsee that this will be a private account, to be shared *only* if and when he or she chooses to do so.

Writing is not required but strongly suggested. In this personal and private activity your Sponsee will most likely discover new insights about him- or herself. Writing about the first three steps often leads naturally to taking the Fourth-Step Inventory.

Many people balk at writing. That's okay. If the person only makes a few notes of things to discuss, then the notebook is a helpful device; it will help save time and focus discussions.

Whether through writing or oral expression, a Sponsor needs to discuss the Steps with the Sponsee and to encourage a Fourth-Step Inventory when the Sponsee feels ready. When nothing seems to be going right, or when progress seems to be at a standstill, the Sponsee just may achieve a breakthrough by taking a Fourth-Step Inventory.

When and how to take the Fifth Step may be a delicate matter to decide. The Sponsor can offer suggestions but the Sponsee must ultimately choose the time and place to "admit the exact nature" of their wrongs to God, themselves, and the other human being.

By this time you will have discovered the best ways to lead your Sponsee through the rest of the Steps.

If you wish to terminate your Sponsorship at any time, you may do so. You might say "I've taught you all I know" or "You know what you need to do" or "I feel you need to hear some new ideas from someone else."

GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. The Families Anonymous Twelve Steps are the basis of our Programme.
2. The Programme focuses on the member and not on the loved one with substance abuse or behavioural problems.
3. Sponsorship is entirely voluntary.
4. It is a good idea to choose a Sponsor with considerable active recovery in FA; some suggest one year.
5. the most effective sponsorship relationships are usually one-to-one. Married couples, or other relationships, often react differently to problems. Therefore, each having their own Sponsor encourages growth and change at their own pace, and in privacy.
6. Experience has shown that when men sponsor men and women sponsor women, those relationships are often the most successful.
7. Sponsorship can be relatively easy to begin and end. The decision may be made by either party. Honesty and loving frankness make this possible.
8. Although it is possible for a Sponsor or Sponsee to have more than one such relationship, they need to *keep it simple*. That is, do not play one off against the other, or use a Sponsor's different ideas, suggestions, and approaches to be argumentative or to procrastinate.
9. It is important to have regular contact. Meeting times and places should be agreed upon by both parties.
10. **Sponsorship is not a substitute for working one's own Programme.** Sponsees need to take responsibility for themselves without expecting their Sponsor to do things *for them*, or make their decisions.
11. **Sponsorship is not a substitute for regular meeting attendance.**
12. A basic tenet of the FA Programme is that members do not give advice, but Sponsees often *ask* for advice. Therefore, a Sponsor needs to exert great caution. Sponsors learn to let the Higher Power be their guide through the Steps.

WORDS THAT HELP

We work for progress, not perfection.

Don't waste your pain; use it to grow and change.

Take small steps.

Is this really your problem?

What is your motive?

How important is it?

You'll be happier if you forgive.

Give it time.

Did it (a particular action) do any good?

Some people can *talk* a good Programme but *not* work it.

You can change yourself. Others you can only love.

When your expectations go up, your serenity goes down.

Now is all you have. Don't project tomorrow.

Take one day at a time.

Is there really anything you can do about this?

The only inventory you have a right to take is your own.

Get your focus off your loved one and lead your own life.

DOs AND DON'Ts FOR SPONSORS

- Do..** Talk about feelings.
Emphasise the value of love, releasing with love, and turning "it" over to a Higher Power.
Share your experience.
Emphasise the Steps.
Suggest working on one problem at a time.
Admit your own fallibility.
- Don't..** Discount your Sponsee's feelings.
Give advice.
Assume responsibility for your Sponsee "making it" in the Programme.
Crowd or rush your Sponsee to do too much at one time.
Make moral judgments.

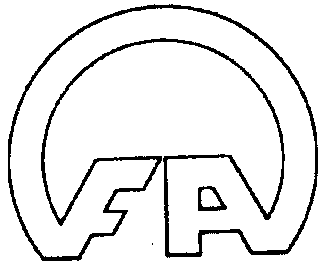
DOs AND DON'Ts FOR SPONSEES

- Do..** Listen to your Sponsor's story.
Call your Sponsor at agreed-upon times, except for emergencies.
Change Sponsors if you feel the relationship is no longer working, or you feel the need for new input.
Be gentle with yourself.
Be good to yourself by getting a Sponsor.
Put emphasis where it belongs.
- Don't..** Expect your Sponsor to give advice or solve your problems.
Lengthen phone calls by repeating yourself.
Refer to your Sponsor by name in casual conversation with others.
Betray a confidence.
Don't be hard on yourself when you make a mistake. Learn from it.

AND FINALLY...

Do keep coming back, even if you think you're not working the Programme correctly. We all progress in different ways and in our own time.

**God, grant me the Serenity to
Accept the things I cannot change,
The Courage to change the things I can,
And the Wisdom to know the difference.**



SPONSORSHIP

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WHAT IT MEANS TO ME

From five FA UK members

They say getting a sponsor is like asking someone out on a date, and they are absolutely right - it can be a very nervous making affair with so many questions. What if it all goes wrong? What if she thinks I'm an idiot? Will I have to stop going to meetings if it doesn't work out? What if she says no?

In my head the potential for disaster is never far away. In reality however, I knew the best thing for me to do, if I wanted just a little bit of the serenity that my fellow FA members had, was to get a sponsor. I desperately wanted to change the way that I reacted to my addict's behaviour.

I found it a little difficult to decide on whom to ask, I liked everyone in my group, and there were good reasons for asking each and everyone one of them.

I finally decided the best thing to do would be to ask someone's advice, so I rang the person that I felt most comfortable with. After talking to her for 5 minutes I knew that I could pretty much tell her anything and not feel worried about her judging me or thinking I was stupid. She was involved in two 12 step fellowships and had a serenity about her that really impressed me. I felt really nervous about asking her, but luckily she prompted me, and now I'm so glad that I did.

I still find it difficult to pick up the phone sometimes, talking about how I feel doesn't come easily to me, but the more I do the easier it becomes, and having her experience as a term of reference for my actions is priceless. Now, when I can't get my head around my 12 step programme, when life throws things at me that seem completely insurmountable, when I have that question 'what now?' going round and round in my head, I know I have the answer, 'pick up the phone and talk to my sponsor'.

I don't know what I would do without her.

Anon

Sponsorship (A male perspective)

Sponsorship is sponsorship, why should there be any difference for the male members of our fellowship to the female members? The hard reality is that we have relatively few male members. Take my own group, there are two of us, and in the time I've attended it's always been two, possibly three, at most. Also, as a fellowship we don't encourage sponsorship the way other fellowships do, why I'm not too sure. I think there are good reasons why it's probably not as practical for FA as say AA, we are quite a small fellowship and members who stay long term tend to be in the minority. This of course means that experienced members who are available to be sponsors are not as plentiful as would be liked.

Most literature on Sponsorship from any 12 step fellowship, ours included, recommends that sponsor and sponsee should be of the same sex. I have spoken to friends in other fellowships on this subject and they all say "it has to be". People, when they come into any 12 step fellowship, are emotionally vulnerable and having a sponsorship relationship of mixed sexes can be a bit of minefield.

When I finally decided that I would look for a sponsor, I looked outwith the fellowship for the reasons I have already stated. I think I also felt a bit awkward. I'd been in the fellowship for a number of years and hadn't felt I was losing out by not having a sponsor, so why now? We had been running a step group for a couple of years and I found that invaluable in getting to grips with the steps and how to apply them effectively in MY LIFE. But having decided to look for a sponsor now came the big decision: who? I was fortunate in that I have friends in other 12 step fellowships with whom I felt comfortable asking. After careful thought, I approached someone about becoming my sponsor. His response was that he would be honoured. To be truthful I hadn't really considered it an honour but on reflection that is exactly what it is.

I am very fortunate that I have found someone whom I can speak to on things I may not be comfortable raising at a meeting. If I feel the need to speak to him outside our meetings, it's not a problem. Whilst he is a member of AA, he is also a father who qualifies for membership of FA. Maybe this is why I find his insight into our discussions and his knowledge of the 12 steps so helpful. He also has the experience of being able to see it from both sides of the fence; I can only look from the one side.

So has having a sponsor made a difference to me? Without a doubt it has but - and there's always a but - in my opinion, it is absolutely crucial to get the right person. Who is the right person? For me it had to be someone to whom at times I was going to be comfortable baring my soul and I was fortunate to find that person. It only took me just over eight years, but it was waiting for the RIGHT SPONSOR
WLITF Michael

Progress not perfection

Six years ago I crawled into FA on my knees. I was exhausted, bewildered and hurting really badly. I had finally admitted (but not accepted) that my 16-year-old daughter was using crack and heroin and that was why her behaviour during the past year had been so crazy. I knew that in reaction to her and in an attempt to control her, my behaviour was also becoming more and more irrational. A lot of the time I did not know where my daughter was and I just imagined the worst. I thought I lost control of her because I had separated from my partner so I blamed myself for everything and was full of guilt and shame. However, at my first FA meeting I heard others share and I realised that parents, family members even friends had been where I was, but they, through a change of attitude and by working the programme did not blame themselves for their addict's behaviour and could live again despite unsolved problems.

Quite quickly I started to feel better, I was able to practise a more programme way of parenting my three younger children, which gave me great happiness and brought us very close. But I was still feeling enormous sadness about my 'using' daughter and harboured huge resentments and blame towards others for my, and my daughter's, situation. Despite getting on quite well with my life I knew that I was not finding the peace, clarity and freedom from myself that I could see in others who worked the 12 Steps and had sponsors.

Someone wonderful agreed to sponsor me and I started to open up. There were many unprocessed issues from my own childhood and I have an addiction myself which I need to address in another fellowship. I was making good progress in my two fellowships when I took on a job, which I loved, but which began to take over my life. I stopped going to FA because if I could not do it 'properly' I would not do it at all. After a while I stopped going to any fellowship and went into a very familiar place called isolation. The emotional pain started to interfere in all aspects of my life again and I sought counselling, which quickly led me back to 12-step programme and the realisation that I needed to work the steps methodically. In that way I would start to 'unpeel' the layers of denial and resentment in a manageable way. As I write my responses to each question in the workbook, I might cry but often I am able to laugh as I recount my behaviour and thought processes to my sponsor. It does not matter, it only matters that I do it. I know also that my next step 4 and 5 will uncover and release much more than the first time because I am growing in strength and honesty and I am better able to understand and take responsibility for my part in how my life has panned out. Most importantly I am slowly beginning to trust that because of faith in a Higher Power and the Anonymity principle I can reveal myself to another person.

I have been told that I can live life forward and understand it backward. Unless I reflect on my life I will not even understand it backwards. That is when I make the same mistakes over and over, going back to the same old painful, familiar places. I am so grateful to FA and my sponsor for being there, and my sponsee whose bravery and honesty is an inspiration. I have finally come to realise that progress not perfection is just that. At last I am going to meetings to 'achieve a change in me and my reactions' not to moan about my addict who has her own Higher Power and path to travel.
Lisa Brondesbury Gp.

Step 5 –A Personal Experience

I have been a member of FA for a good few years and last November decided it was time for me to do my Step 5 with my sponsor.

I had struggled with my Step 4, not unusually I suppose, for about four years. It took me that long to negotiate the journey that is Step 4, particularly as I had just gone back into therapy around the time I was starting it. So, after a chat with my sponsor, we booked the appointment time and I began to feel excited and apprehensive from that moment on.

As the days ticked away, I started to feel a need to get my step work out and go through it to see exactly what it was that I wanted to 'confess'. As I hadn't murdered anyone, (although before FA I am surprised I didn't ring my addicts neck!) my 'sins' were not of the major kind, but of course there were many incidents that I am ashamed of and are extremely personal to me and some that I haven't ever told anyone about.

So, the day arrived and I was nervous. I trusted my sponsor implicitly, but the thought of saying these things out loud was going to take quite a lot of courage. However, I also knew that 'to see ourselves as we really are' needs an honest and fearless inventory and an honest and fearless confession. I needed to acknowledge my faults and misdeeds to another person, my HP but mostly myself.

The meeting started well and as I had written a list of things I wanted to go through, compiled during my Step 4 work, I simply started at the top and worked down. My sponsor listened and commented where she felt appropriate, but for the most part, let me talk. After an hour and a half, we called it a day. I hadn't finished my list and so we booked another appointment the following week.

During that week, I recalled a few more incidents which I added to the list and so I went back for round two. I felt less nervous this time, as I knew what to expect, but none the less I still had a few toe curling/tearful moments.

My conclusion? It's not easy doing a Step 5, but it's not impossible either. I have shared my dark side to another person, God and myself and the world has not collapsed. I was not rejected by my sponsor, in fact after our last meeting she hugged me and said that I was a courageous young woman and had a huge amount of respect for me – which I was very touched by. Subsequently, our relationship has deepened and I find that I am in contact with her more than I have ever been

If I didn't know before, I know now that I am not perfect and I have no right demanding perfection from anyone else, including my mother, partner, addict, politician, and spiritual leader...even myself. Perfection isn't the nature of humanity. But, as long as I am conscious of my dark side and can see and accept it, I will be well on the way to cultivating serenity – the prize I so richly covet.

WLITF Anon

Being a Sponsor is one of the most rewarding as well as challenging relationships I have ever experienced.

It can also be fun, intense and sometimes not at all easy. It requires a degree of commitment in both time and emotional energy and the ability to listen without judgement.

For me, it has been essential to have a Sponsor myself whilst I am actively sponsoring someone else. I have experienced tough times, where a Sponsee is demanding and some of the things they are going through have brought up uncomfortable feelings in me. When this has happened I have talked them through with my Sponsor and thus grown in my own recovery.

Sponsoring has made me work my programme a bit harder. It would be so easy for me to get sucked into old patterns of behaviour, such as giving advice and getting too involved. I can usually tell when I do get too involved however, as I start to become resentful of a person or situation and so I know, as soon as this happens, that I need to detach with love immediately. I also have to watch my boundaries around some of my Sponsees and let them work their programme at their own pace. I can feel frustrated that their recovery isn't going according to *my* plan and have to remind myself that I am powerless, and not responsible for my Sponsee's recovery and that, of course, everything happens in 'God's time'.

I was very nervous the first time a person asked me to be their Sponsor. I remember flapping quite a lot and saying 'No, I don't think I am ready'. And I was probably right. The second time I was asked, I said 'yes' straight away, although I was very concerned that I'd not sponsored anyone before and that I might get it wrong. I also knew that 'if it's not going to be perfect, I'm not going to bother' would be my excuse to not do. So I launched myself - and read and re-read the 'Families Anonymous and Sponsorship' guide.

My Sponsee and I met up for regular meetings after our FA meeting and we chatted for about an hour. I felt that it was important for us to set a time limit, as then we both knew where we stood. I was also willing to take phone calls at any time, and if I really couldn't speak, told my Sponsee that I would say when I could call her back.

I encouraged her to work through the Steps using the FA workbook and we would discuss her answers. It is of course up to my Sponsee to decide whether to do Step 5 with me, but I have done it myself with my Sponsor.

I have felt both love and compassion in my Sponsor relationships, as well as judgemental and resentful! I have overly 'done' for my Sponsee and sometimes not done enough. But guess what, I'm not perfect and perfection is not a requirement for being a Sponsor – thank goodness! It isn't easy and it isn't difficult – it's so hard to pin down. It is however, I know for sure, one of the best tools I have in my recovery toolkit.

After all the years of trying to be of use to my addict and feeling utterly useless, in sponsoring someone else, I have the ability to give the most amazing gift of all – that of my recovery and myself. I would recommend being a Sponsor to anyone who felt that they were ready.

Anon FA UK