

IP No. 29

If you're new to NA or planning to go to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting for the first time, it might be nice to know a little bit about what happens in our meetings. The information here is meant to give you an understanding of what we do when we come together to share recovery. The words we use and the way we act might be unfamiliar to you at first, but hopefully this information can help you get the most out of your first NA meeting or help you feel more comfortable as you keep coming back. Showing up early, staying late, and asking lots of questions before and after meetings will help you get the most out of every meeting you attend.

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*Effective meeting formats keep the primary purpose in focus and encourage members to participate in a way that expresses recovery.*

Tradition Five, *It Works: How and Why*

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Our Basic Text, *Narcotics Anonymous*, provides the best description of who we are and what we do: "NA is a nonprofit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean." The Twelve Steps of NA are the basis of our recovery program. Our meetings are where we share recovery with one another, but applying our program consists of much more than simply attending NA meetings. People have all sorts of reasons for attending NA meetings, but the purpose of each meeting is to give NA members a place to share recovery with other addicts. If you are not an addict, look for an open meeting, which welcomes non-addicts. If you're an addict or think you might have a drug problem, we suggest a meeting every day for at least 90 days to get to know NA members and our program.

NA literature is also a great source of information about our program. Our Basic Text (*Narcotics Anonymous*) or our informational pamphlets (IPs) are good places to start. Most meetings offer IPs for free, while NA books are generally sold at the group's cost. Much of our literature is also available to read or order online at [www.na.org](http://www.na.org).

## **General information that applies to NA meetings**

- ⊗ We are not concerned with types or amounts of drugs used; we focus on the ways addiction and recovery affect our lives.
- ⊗ NA meetings are not classes or group therapy sessions. We do not teach lessons or provide counseling. We simply share our personal experiences with addiction and recovery.
- ⊗ Meetings are often held in churches, treatment centers, or other facilities, because these places tend to be affordable, available, or convenient. NA is not a part of or connected to any other group, organization, or institution.
- ⊗ To respect the anonymity of all of our members, we ask that people who attend our meetings not talk about who our members are or what they share in meetings.
- ⊗ NA has no membership fees or dues, but it does cost money to hold meetings and provide other services to further our primary purpose. Our members make voluntary contributions at meetings to support the group and other efforts to carry our message. Nonmembers are asked not to contribute so NA can remain fully self-supporting.

Our program of recovery begins with abstinence from all drugs, including alcohol. Sometimes people come to NA meetings while still using drugs, detoxing from drugs, or on drug

replacement therapy. Regardless of what you may be taking when you first come to NA, you are welcome. Also, newer members often have questions about prescribed medications. We encourage you to read NA literature including the Basic Text and the booklet *In Times of Illness*, which will explain NA's approach to recovery. It also helps to talk to NA members who have faced similar situations about what worked for them. Sponsorship can be a vital tool for understanding this and other issues in our recovery (see IP #11 for more information on sponsorship). We are not professionals and NA has no opinions on medical matters; we can only share our personal experiences with one another.

## **A few things you might expect to see or experience in our meetings**

NA meetings come in all shapes, sizes, and flavors, and so many things are done differently in meetings in different cities, different countries, or even just on a different night of the week in the place you live. Still, some things are common to most NA meetings around the world.

- ⊗ Meetings are usually either discussion or speaker meetings. Discussion meetings allow members to take turns sharing. Speaker meetings allow one or more members to share for an extended period of time.
- ⊗ Visitors and newcomers are usually asked to introduce themselves by their first name. Newcomers are usually welcomed with a hug or handshake and a welcome keytag.
- ⊗ In most places, it is customary for members to gather in a circle to end the meeting with a short prayer or NA reading. Though you may hear prayers in meetings, ours is a spiritual, not religious program.

- ⊗ Groups often mark or sign attendance sheets or court cards as a courtesy to people who request it, but some groups and members choose not to do so. If needed, it is best to ask how the group handles this before the meeting begins.
- ⊗ Most groups provide schedules or directories of other local NA meetings.

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*Many of us understand God to be simply whatever force keeps us clean. The right to a God of your understanding is total and without any catches.*

Step Three, Basic Text

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## **About sharing**

- ⊗ NA relies on the “therapeutic value of one addict helping another.” Nonmembers are asked not to share in meetings, though some groups may allow brief participation during NA birthday or anniversary celebrations.
- ⊗ Members are usually asked to share only once per meeting, mindful of the meeting’s time limitations. Many meetings ask members to limit sharing to five minutes or less.
- ⊗ Members are also encouraged to avoid “crosstalk,” which means we share our own experiences instead of responding to other members. Individuals can have conversations before or after meetings.
- ⊗ Some groups ask members to refrain from sharing explicit details and descriptions of drugs and using in meetings, and to focus instead on how addiction and recovery have affected us.
- ⊗ Newcomers are generally encouraged to focus on listening, but they are welcome to share during the participation portion of the meeting.

- ⊗ Newcomers are encouraged to listen closely to identify experienced members they can relate to who might make good sponsors or friends, or offer other guidance and support.

## **Cultivating an atmosphere of recovery in our meetings**

Groups may vary on how they choose to address some meeting-related matters. We encourage you to check each meeting out for yourself to get a better idea of what is expected at that meeting. The following basics are common in many meetings.

- ⊗ Some meetings have a short break for members to talk, get refreshments, use the restroom, or smoke. At meetings with no break, we usually wait until after the meeting.
- ⊗ We don't allow drugs or drug paraphernalia in any NA meetings.
- ⊗ We strongly discourage any harassment, threats, or disturbing behavior before, during, and after our meetings. This includes unwelcome sexual, romantic, financial, and religious solicitation. Our meetings are for sharing NA recovery. If you feel harassed or threatened, share your concerns with the meeting leader or a trusted servant.
- ⊗ We ask latecomers to find a seat quietly and avoid distracting people.
- ⊗ We discourage side conversations. Even at a very low whisper, they distract others.
- ⊗ Phone calls and text messages also distract others. We ask members to turn off or silence their cell phones and other electronic devices during meetings.
- ⊗ In many places, hugs are a common NA greeting. If you're not comfortable hugging, don't hesitate to say so. Most members will be understanding about this.

Our meetings vary widely in size and style. Some are small and intimate; others are large and loud. The practices and terms used in our meetings also vary widely from one place to another. Most importantly, our meetings are where we share our experience, strength, and hope. If you're an addict, keep coming back and share recovery with us!

## Some helpful NA terms

**ADDICT**—the term we use to refer to ourselves because we see addiction itself as the problem, rather than the use of a specific drug

**BASIC TEXT**—the book that contains our core ideas, entitled *Narcotics Anonymous*

**CLOSED MEETING**—meeting only for addicts or those who think they might have a drug problem

**GROUP**—members who hold one or more regularly scheduled NA meetings (see IP #2, *The Group*)

**HIGHER POWER**—any loving force that helps a member stay clean and seek recovery

**IPS**—information pamphlets about NA

**NEWCOMERS**—new NA members

**OPEN MEETING**—meeting that welcomes anyone to attend, including interested non-addicts

**RELAPSE**—a brief or extended return to drug use

**SHARING**—offering personal experience with addiction and recovery

**SPONSOR**—experienced member who offers guidance and support through the Twelve Steps (see IP #11, *Sponsorship*)

**TRUSTED SERVANTS**—members who have service positions in NA

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ISBN 9781557769824 • English • 6/14

WSO Catalog Item No. EN-3129