

For the Parents or Guardians of Young People in NA

Young addicts all over the world have found recovery from drug addiction in Narcotics Anonymous, but not without often struggling through some very common questions with their family or caregivers. This pamphlet addresses some of the questions parents or caregivers may have when a child finds NA. The information here is not meant as advice about how to parent your child; rather, it relates some common experiences about how to support a young person recovering in NA. This information can also be helpful for any loved one interested in learning more about the issues a young member faces in recovery.

The NA Program

The following points about the Narcotics Anonymous program are meant to help parents and family members have a better understanding of what a young member is experiencing when they come to NA.

What Can I Expect When My Child Finds NA?

The program of NA is found in the Twelve Steps (as well as other NA literature) and focuses on addiction as a “physical, mental, and spiritual disease that affects every area of our lives.” As a result, recovery in NA involves more than simply abstinence from drugs.

Some parents worry that NA is only for those who have used “hard” drugs, like heroin. Although NA stands for “Narcotics Anonymous,” NA is a fellowship for addicts who have used any type of drug or mind-altering substance like inhalants.

What Happens at NA Meetings?

Many parents are curious about what happens at NA meetings. NA members have had a variety of experiences and come from many walks of life. This diverse group comes together in NA meetings to help each other recover from addiction and learn a new way to live. NA members typically socialize before and after meetings, and in many communities greet each other with hugs. This is part of how members form

relationships with other recovering addicts and develop a sense of community. NA meetings are central to helping members feel supported in their new lifestyle.

What you're most likely to find at an NA meeting is a group of members talking openly about their successes and struggles with not using drugs. Members often share about facing typical life challenges and how they've attempted to meet those challenges through practicing the principles found within the Twelve Steps.

The best way to find out what happens at a meeting is to attend one in your area. "Open" NA meetings welcome friends, family, and members of the community, whereas "closed" meetings are for addicts only. The local NA meeting directory or helpline typically indicates which meetings are "open" and which are "closed."

Sponsorship in NA

A sponsor is an integral part of a recovering addict's NA program. A sponsor is a more experienced NA member who helps a newer member by sharing their experience staying clean and guiding the "sponsee" in applying the Twelve Steps. A sponsor is not paid and is not a counselor or a professional. However, this relationship is a vital part of how addicts learn how to live life without using drugs.

Some parents have questioned this relationship because their child is now seeking a sponsor's guidance instead of a parent's. This relationship is not meant to replace a parent's guidance, but is crucial to your child's recovery. Arranging a meeting with your child's sponsor may help you feel more comfortable with this new relationship. However, sponsorship is built on trust and confidentiality, and asking a sponsor to discuss information your child has shared can threaten the foundation of this relationship.

Because the ability to share honestly is so crucial to this relationship, members typically avoid choosing a sponsor with whom there could eventually be a sexual attraction. For some members this means choosing a sponsor of the same gender or anyone with whom no attraction is likely to form. For more information about sponsorship in NA, see IP #11 or the book titled, *Sponsorship*.

How Is NA Funded?

NA is self-supporting through member contributions. Those who are able contribute a small amount of money to help keep NA meetings running. This money helps pay for meeting space, refreshments, and NA literature. NA literature can also be purchased at NA meetings, though much of our literature is free (only the book-length pieces are for sale).

Who Runs NA Meetings?

NA is a twelve-step program of recovering addicts; members are not drug-addiction professionals. NA groups are run by NA members, and it is typical for members to have specific service responsibilities at a local NA group (such as setting up chairs, making coffee, or collecting members' contributions). These responsibilities often mean a greater commitment to regularly attending that particular NA meeting

Meeting Attendance

NA members find that regular meeting attendance helps them stay clean from drugs and feel connected to the NA program and fellowship. NA literature suggests that those who are new to NA attend a meeting a day for at least the first ninety days, and then maintain regular meeting attendance.

Restricting your child by preventing him or her from attending NA meetings may be counterproductive to the recovery process. For a recovering addict, this can be the equivalent of being grounded from school or not being allowed to treat an illness.

With meetings every night, NA dances, conventions, and rides with new people, it may seem as though your child's lifestyle hasn't changed.

Recovery in NA involves creating new, healthy relationships that may take up much of your child's time and attention. These relationships are an important part of achieving abstinence from drugs and learning how to live a new way of life.

Will NA Take My Child Away from the Family's Religion?

NA is a spiritual program and does not endorse or oppose any religion. NA's "spiritual program" is simply the practical application of principles, such as honesty and gratitude, in everyday life. NA is not in competition or conflict with religion, nor does NA require members to be religious. In many instances, NA complements any existing religious or spiritual beliefs.

The Family's Role

When a young person finds NA, most parents just want to know what kind of role to play in their loved one's recovery—how supportive or how strict they should be. The answer to this question will be different for everyone, but it may be helpful to keep in mind that recovery is a process that takes time. It is usually unrealistic to expect dramatic results after a month. Learning how to practice the principles contained within the Twelve Steps is a uniquely personal process, consisting of things such as taking a personal inventory and making amends. It is typical for members to behave somewhat erratically in early recovery—yet, over time, members usually find some consistency and balance in their lives. This section is designed to help family members understand and support their child in this recovery process.

How to Support Complete Abstinence

Because NA is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs, spending time around family members who use alcohol or other drugs may place an unnecessary hardship on your child's recovery. Some families have found that minimizing the use of alcohol or other drugs during family gatherings can be an important way of supporting a child's choice of recovery.

If Your Child Is Taking Medication...

NA members sometimes offer their personal opinions about the use of prescribed medication for mental or physical health. Members may even tell your child that he or she is not clean. These are the opinions of individual NA members, not NA as an organization. NA has no opinion on the use of prescribed medication.

Injuries or surgeries that may require the use of pain medication can be confusing for parents who are trying to support their child's abstinence from drugs. The pamphlet titled *In Times of Illness* offers experience and guidance for members who need to take pain medications in recovery. Because taking pain medication is a serious matter for recovering addicts, members often talk with their physician to let them know about their history of drug addiction. It is also typical for members to discuss this matter with their sponsor and other NA members—sponsors often offer support in how medication is handled after a surgery. Yet a sponsor is not a professional, and is only offering experience and support.

How to Support Your Child's Involvement with NA

Many parents feel more comfortable with their child's involvement in NA through building relationships with the NA members involved in their child's life. Meeting your child's sponsor or NA friends can help you get a better sense of who your child is spending time with.

Though your child may have used the phone to aid their drug use, making connections with other members over the phone is a key part of creating new relationships with other people who are not using drugs.

Parents are often concerned about how to help a young member manage responsibilities such as schoolwork and meeting attendance. Finding meetings that aren't in conflict with these responsibilities—such as noontime or weekend meetings—may help to create a balance between recovery and these other responsibilities. For many members, making NA a priority in early recovery means that other responsibilities sometimes suffer. For younger members, this may mean an initial drop in grades or limited participation with the family. Over time, members are usually able to find a greater degree of balance in their lives and often go on to make extraordinary accomplishments.

Recovery in NA is an ongoing process—members continue to attend NA meetings long after they’ve stopped using drugs. Asking your son or daughter when they are going to stop attending meetings doesn’t come across as supportive.

Getting involved and encouraging your child’s recovery are probably the most important actions you can take. Simple things, such as telling your child you are proud of him or her, help support the recovery process. Some parents even attend their child’s recovery anniversary and encourage regular contact with a sponsor. It is completely appropriate to take time to get to know the new NA members in your child’s life.

Understanding Relapse

It is not uncommon for some recovering addicts to relapse and return to using drugs. There are often consequences from family members as a result of this behavior, but a relapse doesn’t necessarily mean that an addict won’t return to recovery and eventually find continuous abstinence from their drug use. Unfortunately, relapse is a part of some people’s recovery process. However, our literature explains that “we have never seen a person who lives the Narcotics Anonymous program relapse.” Many members come back from a relapse and enjoy long-term recovery. For more information about relapse, see the chapter in the Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text titled “Recovery and Relapse” or the *Recovery and Relapse* informational pamphlet.

Support for Families

Many family members find the support they need in groups designed to help the families and loved ones of addicts (such as Nar-anon and Families Anonymous). Narcotics Anonymous is not affiliated with these organizations, nor do we recommend one program over another. We simply provide this information in a spirit of cooperation.

This material was created from the experience of younger members who have successfully stayed clean from drugs in Narcotics Anonymous. We hope this information will help other young members and their parents in this often confusing process of recovery.