

## HOW TO APPROACH SELF-HELP MEETINGS

Self-Help meetings come in many forms and functions: perhaps the most common to the recovering population are Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Al-Anon, however there are many more. Most self-help meetings operate in similar ways which may not be entirely natural and intuitive to those new to the meetings. The following is a guide to help anyone who would like to maximize the benefits of self-help meetings.

- Be prepared to try many meetings. All meetings have their own style and personality; keep looking until you find one that fits you. Also, attend the same meeting at least three times before making a decision on whether you like it or not.
- Attend different types of meetings. For example, if you attend AA go to a speaker meeting and a step-study meeting; also attend an Al-Anon once in a while. All self-help meetings will carry significant messages for you if you let them.
- Attend meetings that are close enough and accessible enough for you to attend regularly. It can be difficult to find a meeting that suits your style and makes you comfortable after a few meetings, so try to find a meeting that you can reliably get to in case you really like the meeting.
- Schedule self-help meetings as a part of your recovery plan and make them a priority. Go to meetings as scheduled, even if you don't feel like it at the time. Once you're there, you'll like it. Try to attend the same meetings each week.
- Go to meetings on your own or with a recovering friend, but not with a significant other or spouse. The meeting is so you can work on your own recovery, so simplify and make the meeting about you. The only exception is if the meeting is a couple's meeting.
- Introduce yourself to others at the meeting. Get there early, mix with people during breaks, and stay afterward. Walk up to someone, stick out your hand, and say hello. Everyone at self-help meetings expects new people to say hello, so don't be intimidated. Build up the courage, make the effort and meet people like yourself: in recovery. You will be surprised at how great many of the people are at meetings. If you need a starter communication, try these;
  - Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am new to this meeting. Can you tell me how it works for you?
  - Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am new to the program. Can you tell me what to expect at this meeting?
  - Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am new to the area. What meetings do you like around here?
- Sit near the front of the meeting. The first couple of rows are where you will find the people that will be most interested in meeting you. You will also be able to hear everything and better see how the meeting works.

- Once you find a meeting that you really like, go every week. Get to know people well and get involved with the meeting. There is always help needed, whether it be making coffee or cleaning up chairs at the end of the meeting. You will find that by getting involved you will meet people and begin to develop strong friendships in recovery.
- Share at a meeting if you are comfortable doing so, but not before. If you are called upon to speak and do not want to, simply say “I pass” and it is no big deal. The meeting leader will simply move on to the next person, and nobody will pass judgment on you for not sharing.
- Listen to the message if it is healthy. Remember that these meetings are self-help: that means many speakers will be trying to figure things out as they share. You may hear something that is life changing, and you may hear something that is ridiculous. Try not to pass judgment on people as they share, and expect that they will not pass judgment on you as you share. Personalities will also come through, and many times you will find the speaker to be offensive for whatever reason: try to ignore the personality and listen to the message as there may be a valuable lesson in what is being shared. This may not come easy, so keep working on it.
- Don’t listen to absolute messages that don’t make sense. There are many people that misunderstand concepts and bend messages to fit their own perception of the world. If it does not sound sensible, it probably is not. You can always discuss it with others before or after the meeting as well.
- Ask for help if you do not understand a concept or a message. People at self-help meeting love to help other people, so give them the opportunity to be of service to you.
- Never interpret any message as being set in concrete. All things change over time and with circumstances. While some messages rarely change, they can change under the right circumstances, so be prepared to be flexible and accepting.
- Self-help meetings should be of value to you almost every time you go. You should feel some sort of connection, relief, enlightenment, fellowship, fun and happiness most every time. If you do not, try another meeting or consider therapy.
- Try to have fun at meetings. Tell a joke or two, or hang out with the people that seem to be smiling and laughing a lot. Good fun is an excellent healer. Have fun in your recovery.