[For the PARENTS or Guardians OF YOUNG People in NA]

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This pamphlet seeks to address some of the questions parents or caregivers may have when a young person comes to Narcotics Anonymous. The information here is not meant as advice about how to parent your child, but rather relates some common experiences of young people who have been successful in staying clean and finding recovery in NA. Young members all over the world have found recovery from drug addiction in Narcotics Anonymous, and we hope this information will be helpful for any loved one interested in learning more about the experiences a young member faces in recovery.

The NA Program

The NA program 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.

WHAT HAPPENS AT NA MEETINGS?

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 normal life challenges and how they've attempted to meet those challenges through practicing the principles found within the Twelve Steps. NA members often socialize before and after meetings, and in many communities greet each other with hugs. NA meetings give members an opportunity to form relationships with other recovering addicts and develop a sense of community. These relationships are central to helping members feel supported in their new lifestyle. NA meetings are typically facilitated by a member who acts as a chairperson. Many groups hand out keytags to celebrate milestones of recovery.

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.

In NA, our recovery focus is on the disease of addiction, not a particular substance. Although NA stands for "Narcotics Anonymous," NA is a fellowship for addicts who have used any type of drug or mind-altering substance.

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, when possible, and then maintain regular meeting attendance. Many young members have said that being restricted from attending meetings can hurt their recovery process. For a recovering addict, this can be the equivalent of being grounded from school or not being allowed to treat an illness. Recovery involves creating new, healthy relationships, and this usually begins in NA meetings. These relationships are an important part of achieving abstinence from drugs and learning how to live a new way of life.

SPONSORSHIP IN NA

A sponsor is an integral part of a recovering addict's program. A sponsor is a more experienced NA member who helps a newer member by sharing his or her 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. A sponsor is also not responsible for a sponsee's recovery or ability to stay clean. However, this relationship is a vital part of how addicts learn to live without using drugs.

Some young people in NA have found that arranging a meeting between their sponsor and their parent can help parents 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. For more information about sponsorship in NA, see informational pamphlet #11 or our 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 usually be purchased at NA meetings, though some of our literature is provided free of charge.

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.

How Young Members Have Found Support from Their Families

When a young person finds NA, most parents just want to know what kind of role to play in their loved one's recovery. 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. Learning how to practice the principles contained within the Twelve Steps is a uniquely personal experience, consisting of things such as taking a personal inventory and making amends. This section outlines some of the ways young people have found support from their families for their recovery.