

Some Thoughts on Sponsoring



FOOD ADDICTS
in recovery anonymous

Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA) offers a solution for all forms of food addiction. Many people are finding recovery in FA from obesity, undereating, bulimia, and obsession with food. There are no dues or fees; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

Introduction

We ask a qualified sponsor to guide us through the recovery program on all three levels: physical, mental, and spiritual. Sponsors are FA members who are committed to abstinence and to living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability...

*The Tools of Recovery: Sponsorship
(Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous, Inc. 2009)*

The tools of FA and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions teach us that sponsorship is a necessity and a responsibility for every food addict in recovery. By sponsoring, we ensure our own abstinence and the ongoing strength of FA.

When we have been abstinent long enough to become sponsors, many of us feel anxious. We are keenly aware of how much we don't know and are afraid we will make "mistakes." How can we guide others as wisely as our own sponsors have guided us?

No one can learn to sponsor by reading a pamphlet, of course. We learn over time by being sponsored, asking questions, thinking about our experiences, talking with our sponsors and other FA members, and, above all, by asking our Higher Power for help.

We hope this pamphlet will be an additional aid for anyone in FA. It is based on the thoughts of long-time FA members

who have years of abstinence and experience. It offers some principles many have found helpful.

Why must we sponsor?

FA members experience sponsoring as a joy and one of life's greatest privileges. But the primary reason we sponsor is that we must pass on the solution we have been given in order to remain in recovery ourselves. We sponsor because

- Food addiction is a disease of denial. By sharing our own experience of addiction and recovery with our sponsees, we take out insurance against denial and complacency.
- By sponsoring, we help build a strong FA fellowship and solid meetings, both of which we need to stay abstinent ourselves.
- We have a responsibility and duty to give back what we have been given so generously. This is the essence of the Twelfth Step.
- Our commitment to give to our own sponsees is an important part of our new way of life. As active food addicts, we were driven by self-centeredness and fear. In recovery, we practice unselfish giving. Choosing faith over fear and willingness over laziness, we humbly acknowledge that we can share whatever we know.

What does a sponsor do?

The tool of sponsorship clearly defines the role of an FA sponsor: to guide a sponsee “through the recovery program on all three levels: physical, mental, and spiritual.”

- As sponsors, we share our understanding of food addiction and recovery by talking about how we live the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Our role is to help our sponsees attain abstinence and develop a relationship with their own Higher Power.
- We share hope by using our own life stories to show how a Higher Power can help us. There are many miracles in our fellowship. With continuous abstinence and a new way of life based on faith and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, it is not uncommon for us to gain full health. In some cases, our physicians take us off medications prescribed for the physical ailments brought on by addictive eating. They also may wean us off medications taken for anxiety and depression.
- Whether or not we are trained in a medical field, our responsibility is to speak only as recovering food addicts. We strongly urge our sponsees to consult their physicians regarding any potential physical issues. Members with diabetes, hypertension, or Crohn’s Disease, those who have had bariatric surgery, who are pregnant or breastfeeding, are teenag-

ers or very elderly, enormously overweight or underweight – all of these and any others with medical concerns – should be guided to seek advice from their physicians before beginning the program.

- Sponsor, sponsee, and physician can then devise a food plan that appropriately addresses the physical condition and the disease of food addiction.
- FA sponsors cannot and should not give direction or advice regarding mood altering (psychotropic) medications. We leave such matters to the sponsee and his or her physician. Instead, we help our sponsees focus on abstinence, gratitude, and service, which are the sources of personal change in our program. If we are worried about a sponsee's mental stability or if he or she mentions suicidal thoughts, we insist that our sponsees immediately consult an appropriate professional. It may not be the time for them to be in FA. They may need other help instead.

When is a member ready to sponsor?

Members are ready to sponsor when they have:

- **Continuous abstinence in FA.** We cannot help our sponsees put down food as a drug unless we ourselves have a simple, disciplined, and honest food plan that enables us to reach a healthy weight and maintain it.

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- **Experience.** FA sponsors need a minimum of six months of continuous abstinence attained through work with an FA sponsor.
 - **Commitment to the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.** One-day-at-a-time recovery from food addiction requires us to commit to abstinence as a top priority and to a life centrally guided by the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We cannot help our sponsees gain and maintain this commitment unless we have it ourselves.

Some Helpful Principles

Each person in FA sponsors according to his or her own experience, but members with many years of abstinence have found the principles below useful. We hope they will be helpful to you, too.

As sponsors, we help our sponsees – and ourselves – remember that food addiction is as deadly an illness as any other addiction and that we must put our recovery first.

- We discuss the importance of each of FA's tools of recovery (abstinence, sponsorship, meetings, telephone, anonymity, literature, writing, and service) as integral to our way of life and explain that we use them daily.
- We talk about food addiction as a disease of isolation and help our sponsees understand the need to attend several committed FA meetings each week.

There are no phone meetings in FA so we encourage them to go to in-person AA meetings if FA is not available.

- We recognize that we are role models. We make our time with our sponsees a top priority. Early on, we usually need to explain that during the fifteen minutes allotted for our daily conversations we should both sit still and do nothing except listen and talk. We encourage them to plan ahead – as we do – so that we can begin on time and can talk quietly in private.
- When it is time for them to sponsor, we urge them to take care of their own recovery first and to maximize their service. At meetings, if no one stands up to sponsor, we encourage our sponsees to stand and offer their assistance. We should always be willing to extend ourselves to help a newcomer.

Our role as sponsors is to help our sponsees learn to find and turn to their own Higher Power.

- We remind our sponsees that we have replaced our dependence on food with dependence on God and that they can do this too. We talk often of prayer, gratitude, and the central importance of quiet time as a daily discipline. We ask the questions that helped us: “what supports your abstinence?” and “what do you think your Higher Power wants you to do?” Remembering that FA is a spiritual program, not a religious one,

we encourage our sponsees to develop a reliance on the God of their own understanding.

We do not sponsor alone.

- The tension and pressure we may feel to give “right” answers and to “tell” our sponsees “the right thing to do” are rooted in the assumption that there is a “right” answer and that we should know it. This is a sign that we have wrongly placed ourselves in the driver’s seat. We pray for guidance when we are uncertain, talk with our own sponsors to clarify our thinking, and remember that “there is a Higher Power, and we aren’t It.”
- It is unhealthy for our sponsees to become dependent on us, so we encourage them to develop a strong network within the fellowship through daily calls to other members and regular attendance at in-person meetings. When they confront issues we have never faced, we can almost always think of others in program who have relevant experience. We get permission to give their names and then encourage our sponsees to call them.
- When we are in conflict with a sponsee, we can talk with our sponsors or more experienced FA members. In such situations, we are not breaking anonymity if we are keeping the vision on ourselves and looking for ways to be more helpful.

Our sponsees can't effectively use us as sponsors unless they trust us. We try to encourage and earn their trust.

- We speak openly about anything that might help them – our sorrows, struggles, joys, failures, feelings of anger or shame. This helps them see that they are not alone or different and makes it easier for them to talk about whatever might be on their minds.
- Our immediate tendency may be to leap in and offer advice, but we are most useful when we try first to understand. We ask questions and listen carefully.
- When our sponsees share confidences about their lives, we respect their anonymity and privacy. We do not talk about them with others in the fellowship, at meetings, or with our spouses or partners.
- We are kind and courteous. Feelings can sometimes run high during conversations between sponsors and sponsees. We try to remember that we are sharing principles. We practice saying our thoughts and then let go and let God.

As sponsors we are sharing our understanding of a way of life based upon faith and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We are not giving commands or proclaiming rules.

- It is said that food addicts are people who are allergic to flour, sugar, and being told what to do. When we make suggestions, we explain the logic lying

behind them. Early on, we may tend to cite our own sponsor (“s/he does it this way, I do it this way, and therefore you should do it this way”). We may also tend to command, or demand (“I will not let you...”). Sponsees must ultimately make their own choices. We are most effective when we explain why we believe that our suggestions make continuous, contented abstinence possible.

We care about our sponsees’ recovery more than we care about being liked.

- Many of us fear conflict and try to avoid it. As sponsors, our first priority is to support recovery, so we must be honest. We pass on the program as we have received it and as it works for us. Otherwise, we are failing our sponsees, weakening our own recovery, and diminishing FA as a whole.
- We do not accept unacceptable behavior. Like us, our sponsees may feel raw and defensive sometimes. While we do understand this, we do not allow our sponsees to speak abusively or rudely to us. If we need to, we politely and firmly end the conversation.

We carry the message, not the person.

- At the outset, we ask our sponsees if they consider themselves to be food addicts, if they want what we have, and if they are willing to go to any lengths to stay abstinent. Sometimes they are not ready for the program or do not welcome

suggestions. They may lie, break their abstinence repeatedly, or be unwilling to change. If we see that we can't be helpful, we need to say so.

- When we part ways, we express our caring and good wishes, encouraging our sponsees in their search for another sponsor or a different path. We affirm that they will always be welcome in FA.

The Joys of Sponsoring

You can best write this paragraph yourself, but we would like to end by remembering a few of the many joys of sponsoring. We come to know “a new freedom” as we share some of our most painful experiences and see a newcomer make use of them. Nothing can compare with the deep happiness we feel when we watch someone who was in despair find hope. The promises of the program come true, and we are humbled and strengthened in our faith when we see how our Higher Power can work through us to help someone else.

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to food addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on FA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for FA membership is a desire to stop eating addictively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or FA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the food addict who still suffers.
6. An FA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the FA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every FA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. FA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the FA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

What is FA?

FA is a program based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. There are no dues, fees, or weigh-ins at FA meetings. FA is a fellowship of individuals who, through shared experience and mutual support, are recovering from the disease of food addiction.

Who joins FA?

FA members are men and women of all ages from all over the world. Some of us have been obese; others have been undereaters, bulimic, or so obsessed with food or weight that we could not freely live our lives. Among us are people who have weighed as little as 62 pounds, those who have weighed more than 400 pounds, and others who have been of normal weight but were obsessed with food or dieting.

Does the program really work?

Typically, FA members have tried any number of solutions to their problems with food, including (for many of us) years of diets or exercise. In FA, we have finally found an answer that is long-term. FA members have maintained normal weights and found freedom from obsession for more than twenty-five years. As more and more newcomers enter the program, the number of people with five or ten years of recovery continues to grow.



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