

problems, and someone who will be our guide in working the 12-steps.

WHY MAY YOU WANT TO GET A SPONSOR?

Addiction from alcohol and substance abuse is so cunning and baffling that at times we need someone to share with; our mental health can be quite difficult to deal with as well. So we might need someone to talk to about what is going on in our recovery from mental health diagnoses. Someone who has been where we are today and who is now where we want to go. In our experience with dual-diagnosis, a sponsor can help us when we are on shaky ground, confused or in emotional pain and need a helping hand. We have not been the best at trusting others. We have gone on alone and this became a problem. As we come into recovery, we find that we need a constant close support as we begin to learn to live clean and sober and mentally healthy; we need constant support to help us through some of the hard times. Then in working the 12-steps, we may be confronted with painful experiences from the past and again, we need support. At such times, turning to our sponsor can help us find the strength and hope to stay the course.

Some of us may already have a sponsor in another 12-step fellowship; if you are getting the help you need from that relationship, you may not want to work with a DTR sponsor. Whether or not to do so is an individual decision.

WHEN TO GET A SPONSOR

It's never too early or too late to get a sponsor, whether you are a newcomer or a more experienced member who for some time has been trying to go it alone. Many people get a sponsor when they feel they are ready to start asking for and accepting help; for some, it's a few weeks after they join DTR, for others, it may be later. Whenever you are ready, remember, sponsorship is yours for the asking.

FINDING A SPONSOR

Attend meetings and listen to what experienced members share about their experience and about how they apply the steps and the program to their daily life. Pick someone by the work they've done on themselves, not because they talk a good game. Consider people's life experiences as they have

shared them at meetings. There are no hard and fast rules but it is strongly suggested a sponsor be at least a year away from drinking and drugging and enjoys working on their mental health recovery. When considering someone to be your sponsor, look for someone who takes care of themselves mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually and who has a firm grasp on what the 12-steps of recovery of DTR, someone who seems reasonably well and is willing to help other recovering dually-diagnosed people. Though the length of time in recovery is an important factor, it is not the only one in successful sponsors. Equally important are an individual's capacity for understanding, patience and willingness to devote time and effort into new members and to be an example that DTR works.

It is strongly suggested that we find a sponsor of the same sex because members of the same sex better understand certain things such as sexuality and relationship problems. It is important that you find someone who is capable of not being judgmental, who can listen and deal with feelings. You may want a sponsor who shares a similar drug and alcohol history, or even the same diagnosis although this is certainly not a must; many of the problems we struggle with cut across substance and diagnosis. Pick someone who has some of the qualities you would like to develop in your recovery. Only you can decide what is best for you.

We look to select a member with whom we feel comfortable, with whom we can talk freely and confidentially. This relationship need not be based on friendship but trust is vital. We want to share our experiences (including some of our darkest secrets) with someone who has done the work, who has been able to work through serious difficulties and whose experience we can trust and respect. Look for someone you know you can trust with what you tell them in confidence and, equally important, someone who can be objective, who will not be hurt by what you share about yourself and about your past. For that reason, it is strongly suggested that we do not pick partners, spouses, close friends or relatives as sponsors or sponsees.

When you have chosen the person you would like as your sponsor, approach them and explain to them what you are trying to do and why. Most people will be willing to help.

THE ROLE OF THE SPONSOR

Recovery is a hard road and no one can go it alone. The sponsor ensures that you don't ever have to. The sponsor gives the newcomer guidance through our program of recovery from dual-diagnosis. When we have any question about our program, we know that we can look to our sponsor; our relationship with our sponsor helps us go beyond just going to meetings and listening about working the steps.

A sponsor is someone who shares with the newer member what DTR means to them; encourages the newcomer to attend DTR meetings, as well as other 12-step meetings to get exposure to various viewpoints about the 12-steps and about recovery; suggests that the newcomer keep an open mind, especially if the newcomer isn't sure they are dually-diagnosed, never taking the other member's inventory, unless asked. The sponsor helps the newcomer work through the literature of DTR and other 12-step books if it can help; the sponsor makes him or herself available, with respect to time and attention, goes over the 12-steps with the newer member and listens to him or her share about the steps. A sponsor never imposes personal views on religion, a specific definition of God or a Higher Power; he or she never claims to have all the answers, never hesitates to encourage the newer member to seek expert help (e.g., medical or legal) if necessary; a sponsor admits what they don't know and helps the newcomer find a good source of information.

The responsibility of the sponsor is to help the newer member in his or her primary purpose of keeping away from that first drink or drug and working on their mental health, and always reminds the member about the First Step. Recognizing always that we have problems with drugs and alcohol and with mental disorders is a key part of recovery.

A sponsor does not and should not provide psychiatric care, therapy, medications or any other form of treatment. When faced with treatment questions, the sponsor should encourage the sponsee to consult with his or her treating professional. Under no circumstances should the sponsor act or be viewed as a therapist. The sponsor-sponsee relationship begins in the fellowship of DTR and ought to remain within the confines of working the 12-step of DTR. A sponsor is simply a dually-diagnosed person on a peer to

peer basis, helping the newcomer solve the problems of staying clean and sober and working on one's mental health. A sponsor has no professional training or responsibility; the relationship is based on experience, gratitude, trust and a shared desire to recover from dual-diagnosis through the 12-step program of DTR.

HOW WE USE A SPONSOR

Communication is the key to this relationship. It is your responsibility to keep in touch with your sponsor outside of meetings, whether by phone, e-mail or in person. It is strongly suggested that you speak with your sponsor daily, even if it is just to say, "Hi, I'm OK today," especially early on in your recovery. The particulars are best decided between you and your sponsor as the relationship and your needs evolve and change over time.

The newcomer is not to take the sponsor's word as law. If the sponsor's idea sounds strange or unclear, ask questions, ask what they mean. And if there is a problem, always feel free to find another sponsor with whom you feel more comfortable.

Sponsorship is a special one-to-one relationship that can give us what we cannot get at meetings: more time, more attention to our specific problems, someone who can answer our questions or just listen to something we are going through and reflect with us with objectivity, empathy and compassion. A sponsor is here to share his or her experience, strength and hope. Sharing about our difficulties with our sponsor on a peer-to-peer basis makes day to day living a lot easier and our struggle less lonely.

WHAT YOUR SPONSOR WILL EXPECT OF YOU

The key elements of the sponsorship relationship are mutual trust and respect, including confidentiality and anonymity (yours and your sponsor's). The sponsor does not make demands but will expect that you make a commitment to working and living the program to the best of your abilities. To those ends, your sponsor may strongly suggest that you attend meetings, regularly, read DTR and other 12-step literature, contact him or her regularly to share your successes as well as your struggles.

WHAT IS DOUBLE TROUBLE IN RECOVERY?

Double Trouble is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other so that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from their particular addiction(s) and mental disorders. Double Trouble is designed to meet the needs of the dually-diagnosed and is clearly for those having addictive substance problems as well as having been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder.



SPONSORSHIP

In the fellowship of DTR, we band together for common good and recovery, one dually diagnosed person helping another. Sponsorship is a mutually beneficial relationship based on trust and respect between two dually diagnosed individuals working toward dual recovery.

Sponsorship provides the newcomer with an experienced guide for the journey of recovery and gives the sponsor the opportunity to pass on what he or she has learned along the way, expressing gratitude and carrying the message of dual recovery through the DTR 12 steps. Sponsorship is a process through which the common bond of the fellowship of DTR lives on.

WHAT IS A SPONSOR?

A sponsor is a clean and sober dually-diagnosed member who shares with the newcomer how he or she attained and maintains sobriety and mental health by working the 12-steps. The sponsor's primary tools are his or her experience, strength and hope. A sponsor is someone we can trust and with whom we can share our life experience, both good and bad; someone we can go to with our

The decision to be a sponsor is important and should not be taken lightly. Whenever possible, we consult our own sponsor before agreeing to sponsor someone else. Our motive in sponsoring another dually-diagnosed person is to help another someone who still suffers. We can only keep it by giving it away.

In deciding whether to sponsor someone, we need to ask ourselves if we are ready and willing to share our experience, strength and hope and to take on the responsibility. Many feel that sponsoring is easier once we have made some headway with our own recovery. By helping others, we reach outside of ourselves and grow spiritually toward wholeness, remembering always that our recovery comes first. There is always a fine line between caring and enabling; as sponsors, our responsibility is to carry the message, not the other person. Sponsoring someone does not mean that you become responsible for their life, their recovery or their mental health. We are not therapists, psychiatrists, moneylenders, marriage counselors or parole officers. It is also important to remember that we are dually-diagnosed. There may be times when we may not be able to relate, when we may see someone in danger of wanting to hurt themselves or someone else; we do our best to direct that person to someone who may help. When you are sponsoring someone, problems may creep up that you will need to discuss with your own sponsor (always respect anonymity and confidentiality in these matters). Remember, even if someone relapses, we're not here to play God, our responsibility is to our own recovery and there will be times when we don't have answers. If we can, we help that person seek the help they need; our program is based on one dually diagnosed person helping another with the help of the God of our understanding but remember, we are not God.

As sponsors, we do everything possible within the limits of personal experience and knowledge to get and stay clean and sober, stay out of the hospital and work the 12-steps of DTR. We live our program one day at a time and help the newcomer partake in what we have been freely given. Out of this common bond, we recover and DTR lives on.

ASK YOURSELF...ARE YOU READY TO BE A SPONSOR?