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LIVING CLEAN



WORK IN PROGRESS (DRAFT) 1983



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We, the WSC-Literature subcommittee, feel the Third Edition of Living Clean is ready for review by the fellowship.

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The following is additional input that we feel should be addressed by your committees: Do Chapters 4, 15, and 29 violate our 10th Tradition? At this time, the World Service Board of Trustees finds no tradition violations; however, maybe these chapters could be improved. Also, we would like your input on quotations from other sources. For example, page 27, St. Francis, page 29, William James, page 33, the bible.

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PRELIMINARY (THIRD) VERSION

Living Clean

The New Member's Guide to the Fellowship
of Narcotics Anonymous

Living Clean

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WORLD LITERATURE COMMITTEE

LIVING CLEAN

WORK IN PROGRESS DRAFT

1. Introduction: how to use this book

This book is intended primarily for the newcomer in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, although we hope that the information in it will be useful to all of our members.

Our drug using was the center of our lives. Around our drug use there developed a system of attitudes, of ways of dealing or not dealing with our environment, that take us years of staying clean to sort out. To recover, we had to change and to learn to differentiate between recovery-oriented and drug-oriented behavior. We feel it is impossible for newcomers to do this and to avoid the many pitfalls recovery holds without relying heavily on the experience of those in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous who have traveled the path before them. This book is a summary of our experiences, selected from our many collective years of recovery. For instance, should a recovering addict drink alcohol or take a medically prescribed narcotic? How can the addict combat the craving for a drug? These are among the many topics discussed in this book.

However, this book is not exhaustive. Nearly any member of Narcotics Anonymous has additional good ideas. Nor is this book to be interpreted in any sense as the Narcotics Anonymous program. That consists of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions of

28 Narcotics Anonymous, and one addict helping another. Rather, this book should be
29 considered a handbook of practical suggestions that can enable the newcomer to cope
30 more effectively with a drug-free life on a day-to-day basis and to utilize better all aspects
31 of recovery offered by the Narcotics Anonymous program.

32 This book contains our experience we have gained in the recovery process dealing
33 with many situations and we hope this experience will be useful to you.

34 In consulting this book you should try to keep an open mind and to exercise your own
35 discrimination. Any principle, no matter how valid, can be perverted. For instance, one of
36 the suggestions we give about combating the craving for a drug by eating a nutritious snack
37 can easily be rationalized into a scheme for compulsive eating. And sometimes a
38 chronically unemployed member justifies his situation by deferring to the slogan, Easy does
39 it!

40 Above all, try to be openminded about the spiritual matters discussed here. Although
41 many of us entered the fellowship violently opposed to ideas such as God and religion, our
42 collective experience has taught us that nothing will defeat us as surely as indifference to
43 our spiritual growth. What exactly that expression means differs from one person to the
44 next, but it usually has little to do with any of our preconceived ideas about God or
45 religion.

46 One sometimes hears that the program is like a cafeteria. One takes the food one
47 wants and leaves the rest behind, presumably to be taken by someone else or even the
48 same member later on in recovery. However, as no one can fare well on a diet consisting
49 solely of starches and desserts, so we need a balance of ideas in our lives. If you object to
50 or fail to understand something you read here, make a mental note to look at it sometime
51 later in your recovery. You may find your appetite for it has changed.

52 Our discussion of the Steps here is brief, and we can give no more than an overview
53 of how we apply these vitally important principles to our lives. After reading our discussion

4 you will undoubtedly seek a more in-depth knowledge of the Steps. To acquire this, you
55 should make Step meetings a regular part of your meeting schedule.

6 For us, recovery starts by practicing total abstinence from the use of mood-changing
7 chemicals. But that is only the start. Stopping is easy. Staying stopped is hard. It requires
8 that we be prepared to change our habits, attitudes, actions, and personalities. We discover
9 we can no longer act or think the way we used to and expect to stay clean. We hope this
10 booklet will help you to make the necessary changes, and we hope it will convince you that
11 there are others who were once in your situation who have, through the program of
12 Narcotics Anonymous, discovered fullness of life.

64 2. Are you an addict?

66 So you're new in Narcotics Anonymous? We're glad to have you here. We think
67 you'll meet a lot of people whose experiences you'll identify with, people you'll like. In
68 appearance our members don't differ much from people you might see on an average street
69 in an average city. Maybe they're a little younger, but that's because the problems we have
70 in common tend to come up early in life. Still, you'll find the middle-aged and older citizen
71 are among us. And we have cooks, housewives, salesmen, mechanics, secretaries, doctors,
72 pharmacists, teachers, the unemployed. Everyone you can imagine. The whole spectrum
73 of humanity is represented.

74 However, we do have things in common. At one time our lives seem to have ground
75 to a halt and no matter what we did nothing good seemed to happen to us. We suspected--
76 but were not always entirely certain--that drugs had something to do with it. Were drugs
77 the cause of our problems or the result of them? we asked ourselves. Our opinions on this
78 seemed to change, as yours undoubtedly have, from one moment to the next. When we
79 began to attend meetings of Narcotics Anonymous we discovered the truth. You will too.

30 Who comes into Narcotics Anonymous? What are our histories? Many and varied.
81 There is the housewife recovering from a suicide attempt--not convinced the pills caused
82 her to try to kill herself. They were just the method she used. And professional men,
83 doctors and pharmacists in particular, who needed an amphetamine to get started in the
84 morning and a sleeping pill to get to bed at night and watched in horror as the habit slowly
85 escalated. Soon they were taking an endless string of medications, each to counteract the
86 side effects of the previous medication. We have students whose college careers are in a
87 shambles because they've become paranoid and lost their motivation. "A pot addict? How
88 could I be? Everyone smokes pot!" Then there are the very young--the huffers and street
89 drug users who could never even make the pretense of getting their lives off the ground--
90 they were high almost from the cradle. Then there are the admitted junkies, sometimes
91 defiant, just out of a drug rehabilitation center to which a court had stipulated them,
92 contemptuous of lowly pill users or those who drank alcohol. "Hell yes, I'm a junkie."
93 (We've all played that game in one form or another. We call it "high but proud.")

94 But despite the differences in our backgrounds, we all stayed around. Narcotics
95 Anonymous wrought drastic changes in all our attitudes--toward ourselves, toward others,
96 and above all, toward drugs. Glue. Pot. Quaaludes. Valium. Heroin. Alcohol. Speed.
97 Cocaine. LSD. Percodan. What do they all have in common? What they have in common
98 is us. We're drug addicts.

99 Drug addicts? Isn't that an awfully strong phrase? For the housewife or student who
100 never gets closer to a needle than a stereo player it conjures up a bizarre image, maybe a
101 dormitory with pale bodies laying around on mattresses, spikes sticking out of arms and
102 pools of blood congealing on the floor. But that, obviously, isn't what you found when you
103 came here. The people seem well-groomed, and are apparently happy. They're full of
104 energy, enthusiastic about sharing their feelings and hopes, their victories and defeats with
105 others. The fact is, when we're clean no one can tell us from the average person on the
106 street.

What is a drug addict then? There are several good definitions, but one of our favorites is the following: Drug addicts are people who have lost the ability to control their lives because of the use of drugs.

We each have a favorite drug or drugs, our "drug of choice" one sometimes hears it called at meetings. But we can switch addictions very easily. If one drug isn't available, we will make do with another. Many is the addict who has tried to control an addiction by switching drugs. The result is always predictable. Sometimes we switch to alcohol, feeling that, because it's a socially approved drug, it must certainly be preferable to heroin or Quaaludes. A disaster always follows (See the section, "Alcohol vs. addiction"). We have seen heroin addicts die from drinking alcohol. And taking a new drug will lead to using our drug of choice.

Like any other disorder, drug addiction has certain symptoms associated with it. These symptoms are remarkably predictable, despite the great variety of substances involved.

For instance, drug addiction is progressive. Look at the way you were last using. Compare it with the way you were using two years ago. With the way you were using when you began. Do you notice a progression? Undoubtedly. It's downhill. Drugs are causing you more pain now than they used to. True, there were periods in our using during which we used drugs very little or not at all. But we always found the periods--we call them "plateaus"--brief and our freedom from drugs only temporary.

Of course, there are other symptoms. We have found it effective to present some of the symptoms of drug addiction as a series of questions.

Perhaps you admit you have a problem with drugs, but seriously doubt you are an addict, or at least an addict in the same sense that we apply that word to ourselves. If you have such reservations, read the questions below and answer them carefully.

- 32 1. Is drug using making your life at home unhappy?
- 33 2. Have you ever switched from one drug to another or to multiple drugs, trying to find
34 the perfect high?
- 35 3. Has your ambition decreased since using drugs?
- 36 4. Have you ever taken more than the prescribed dosage of a prescription drug, or
37 resorted to lying to obtain it?
- 38 5. Have you ever stolen drugs?
- 39 6. Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of using drugs?
- 40 7. Do you use to feel less shy or to feel you belong?
- 41 8. Do you feel guilty about using?
- 42 9. Have you ever been in a hospital, jail, or drug rehabilitation center because of your
43 using?
- 44 10. Does using interfere with your sleeping or eating?
- 45 11. Do you become defensive when people mention your drug using to you?
- 46 12. Does just having drugs in your possession give you a thrill?
- 47 13. Have you ever tried to stop using drugs?
- 48 14. Do you think a lot about using drugs?
- 49 15. Have you noticed your pattern of drug use changing recently?
- 50 16. Do you jealously guard your stash of drugs?
- 51 17. Are you plagued with indefinable fears?
- 52 18. Do you sometimes think you could get your life straightened out if you moved
53 somewhere else?
- 54 19. Do you find yourself jealous, aggressive, angry, or resentful in situations that wouldn't
55 have caused you to be some time ago?
- 56 20. Have you even gotten high when you are alone?
- 57 21. Do you regularly have to have a drug before going to bed, or on arising?
- 58 22. Has your using affected your sexual desire or performance?

- 159 23. Do you ever take one drug to overcome the bad effects of another?
- 160 24. Do you have fewer friends now than two or three years ago?
- 161 25. Do you ever go on prolonged binges of drug usage?
- 162 26. Do you find yourself using drugs around people you think are inferior to you?
- 163 27. Have you ever used street chemicals of unknown composition?
- 164 28. Does the idea of a life without drugs terrify you?
- 165 29. Have you ever had the shakes?
- 166 30. Do you use drugs to control your feelings?
- 167 31. Have you ever searched for a spiritual answer for your life, but couldn't seem to find
168 it?
- 169 32. Do you enjoy getting high less than you used to?
- 170 33. Do you avoid your family when using?
- 171 34. Has your job performance ever suffered as a result of using drugs?
- 172 35. Do you ever feel you could do more with your life if you didn't use drugs?

173 Quite a list, isn't it? Note that some of the questions, nos. 19 and 31, for instance,
174 don't even mention drugs. This is because addiction is an insidious problem that affects all
175 areas of our lives—even those areas which seem at first glance to have little to do with
176 drugs. Further, no specific drug is mentioned. Though there are lots of different drugs,
177 they all spell one disease for us.

178 Well, how did you do? As a rule of thumb, we might say if you answered five or more
179 of the above questions "yes," you definitely have a drug problem. And the more questions
180 you answered "yes," the further along the road of addiction you are. We would probably
181 say that those who answer under ten of the questions "yes" are still in the early stages of
182 drug addiction, over ten in the middle or later stages of addiction. However, once we begin
183 to develop symptoms of drug addiction, the disease will invariably run its course, unless we
184 arrest it by halting our drug use. One often hears it said that being a little bit of a drug
185 addict is like being a little bit pregnant. And it's true.

186 Some of us at first dismissed such tests with words like "Oh, that test's screwed up," or
187 "I'm special. I know I take drugs, but not because I'm an addict. I have real (emotional,
188 family, job) problems." Or "I'm just having a tough time getting it together right now." Or
189 "I'll be able to stop when I (find the right person, get the right job, etc.)."

190 Suppose you come down with severe abdominal pains and a high fever. The doctor
191 diagnoses acute appendicitis and schedules you for immediate surgery. Do you have it
192 done? Of course, you'd be a fool not to. In other words, you have faith in his expertise
193 and experience. Yet you've probably never seen his medical diploma, or asked him what
194 his standing was in his graduating class.

195 We in Narcotics Anonymous have expertise and experience too: a direct, first hand
196 knowledge of drugs that's rivalled by no other group of people on the face of the earth.
197 Furthermore, we know what to do about a drug problem. The people sitting around you at
198 a Narcotics Anonymous meeting are clean, some for many years. The above questionnaire
199 reflects our expertise with drugs. Why should you doubt us and not the doctor? We'll tell
200 you why. Drug addiction is a peculiar disease. It's the only disease that tells you you don't
201 have it. And it's fatal, too, usually more unpleasantly so than appendicitis. Like
202 appendicitis, though, there is a remedy--it's called recovery, or getting clean or staying
203 straight, we use all these phrases interchangeably. It involves getting active in a program.
204 the program of Narcotics Anonymous, that will keep you free of drugs one day at a time
205 and, furthermore, give you the new life you've been looking for. Do you want to go for it?
206 We hope so.

207
208 3. What are your chances?
209

210 We in Narcotics Anonymous believe that drug addiction is a progressive disease
211 which, unless arrested, will invariably lead to jails, institutions or death. We believe that it
212 cannot be cured, in the sense that the addict can never return to some kind of

nondestructive drug use--but can only be arrested. The Narcotics Anonymous program acts to arrest our addiction by helping us to abstain from drugs, that is, from any substance that causes us to get high or that is either mind changing or mood changing.

For the person who has not yet faced his or her addiction squarely, the first sentence above is a very frightening one. It was for all of us. Even more frightening was the thought of having to endure a lifetime without drugs--deprived of any means of quieting our fears or forgetting our troubles or lifting our spirits. It seemed like the cruelest possible fate. One newcomer said it sounded like being buried alive.

But this is the choice you must make. You are now standing at the great turning point in your life. You will choose either to travel the way we have travelled, or to return to the life you have come from. The decision--we call it the First Step--has to be yours. We cannot make it for you, although once you make it we can help you in your life of recovery by sharing with you our experiences. The life of using is full of fear and loneliness. There is fear in being clean, too, but you can share that fear with others who care for you and thereby lessen it. Moreover, in recovery you will find joy and love. For the first time in your life, perhaps, you will feel you belong. You will find you can finally quit running. You will find a home.

We have said that drug addiction is incurable. How do we know? By our experience. We have not yet seen an addict who can return to nonaddictive drug use. We have seen many try, and many die trying. Some are lucky. They are able to make it back to the program; but on returning, they are always worse off than before. More than likely, some of the painful using experiences they had heard other addicts speak of at meetings and which had not yet happened to them did, in fact, happen when they resumed using drugs. Certain drugs they told themselves they would never use they ended up using, or an action--a lie, a theft, a deliberate cruelty--they had considered themselves incapable of they found themselves committing. Sometimes, more tragically, an accident or a fire or an overdose had left them permanently afflicted. We know of addicts now blind who once could see,

40 terribly scarred who once were unmarked, crippled who once could walk. Drug addiction is
41 serious business.

42 In the program you may occasionally hear the word "relapse." This term refers to the
43 action of a member who resumes using drugs. Many of our members have never
44 experienced a relapse. However, we all have our own timetable for recovery. Some of us
45 are not really ready when we reach Narcotics Anonymous, and we may find ourselves using
46 again even after a prolonged period of staying clean. Those of us who have resumed drug
47 use and have been fortunate enough to make it back to the program always bear eloquent
48 witness to the fact that our addiction is progressive. Even if you do not find continuous
49 abstinence immediately, it is important that you attend meetings. None of our members
50 will condemn or judge you. There is a saying that we are all relapsers, but some of us had
51 all our relapses before we found the program. Although complete and continuous
52 abstinence always furnishes the best ground for personal growth, it is possible for you to
53 learn by attending meetings even though you cannot accumulate any length of clean time.
54 The experience of being around people who are clean and getting better may, one day, give
55 you the strength and courage to close the door on drugs.

56 At the very least, returning to using confronts us with new dimensions of despair and
57 hopelessness. One addict who had tried it said he was genuinely surprised at the violence
58 of it. And it comes as a shock to us that we just cannot seem to get very high anymore.
59 Nothing--no new or imaginative combination of chemicals--works to get us very high. We
60 go from being free of drugs to being helpless with almost no intervening period of elation.
61 Drugs, our closest, most faithful and dependable friends, have finally betrayed us. There is
62 no way we can use and enjoy drugs the way we once did. Whether we know it or not, the
63 party is over. If we can accept this fact, it will help us turn our backs on drugs and to move
64 toward recovery. If we do not accept it, even though we stay clean, we will be stuck in a
65 fantasyland, craving and obsessing about the chemicals that, in fact, can no longer give us
66 much pleasure.

277 We believe there is a strong physical component in addiction, and that the
268 progression of the disease reflects some as yet undiscovered change in our body chemistry.
269 We believe that there is no way we can change our body chemistry back to what it once
270 was.

271 What are your chances? Without a program, very poor. Although we in Narcotics
272 Anonymous don't keep statistics, it has been estimated that 97 percent of drug addicts
273 never recover. However, statistics are misleading--they are applicable only to large
274 samples. They cannot describe individual cases. We in Narcotics Anonymous firmly
275 believe that no one is any stronger or any weaker than anyone else. If you sincerely want
276 what we have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it, your chances of getting clean
277 are 100 percent. In fact, we will make you a specific guarantee that, if you take certain
278 suggested steps, you will not use. The steps you must take, and which are described in the
279 rest of this book, are very simple. They are simple and practical. We are practical people.
280 Coming to terms with the fatal nature of our addiction made us that way.

281
282 4. Do I need a rehabilitation center?

283
284 Occasionally the newcomer must make the decision to go into a rehabilitation center
285 (rehab) or a detoxification unit. Those with a history of the abuse of downers are the more
286 likely candidates for this kind of special treatment. Convulsions following withdrawal from
287 sedatives are a medical crisis, and if you have a history of sedative dependency, you should
288 talk to a doctor.

289 There are several good reasons for going to a rehab other than to weather out the
290 effects of drug withdrawal. It may provide the newcomer with the opportunity to escape an
291 intolerable living or working environment, for instance, the addicted pharmacist or doctor,
292 or a person who is living with his parents but exists in a total temperamental deadlock with
293 them. When family gatherings are a nightmare of screaming and recriminations and yet

94 some degree of financial dependence on the family is, for the moment, necessary, the
95 newcomer should consider the possibility of going into a rehab.

96
97 5. What is Narcotics Anonymous

98
99 Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who are addicts but who no
100 longer use. We are not composed of professional, social, health, or government workers
101 except as such people may themselves be addicts. The only requirement for membership in
102 Narcotics Anonymous is the desire to stop using. We do not care what drugs you used or
103 what your past activities were. Our only concern is whether or not you wish to get clean
104 and how we can help.

105 Narcotics Anonymous is not associated with any religious sect or governmental
106 organization and does not oppose nor endorse any special causes. We exist solely to stay
107 clean ourselves and help other addicts to get clean. You will be charged nothing for
108 membership in Narcotics Anonymous; we support ourselves through our own
109 contributions.

110 We believe that addiction is not a single disorder but rather a three-fold illness: part
111 physical, part mental, part spiritual. The way that our addiction affects each of these
112 aspects of our being and the way the program works to relieve our addiction--to heal these
113 three parts of us--are the subject of this book.

114 Quite briefly, the healing we receive through Narcotics Anonymous comes through
115 meetings, through the strength and support offered by the Fellowship, and through the
116 application of the principles in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

117 It is our firm belief, one based on an enormous amount of observation and first hand
118 experience, that no one, once an addict, can return to the informal use of drugs. It is for
119 this reason that Narcotics Anonymous is a program whose immediate goal is complete

321 abstinence from all drugs. We stop using, period. The program gives us the strength, one
322 day at a time, not to pick up the first drug.

323 Narcotics Anonymous does not make a decision as to whether you or any other
324 person is a addict. We can tell you what certain symptoms of addiction are and share
325 some of our experiences with you. The diagnosis of your own condition you alone can
326 make.

327 Narcotics Anonymous has no official opinion on outside issues. We do not, for
328 instance, get involved with efforts to legalize or penalize the use of any drug. To do so
329 would detract us from our primary purpose: to get and stay clean.

330 A new life can be yours for the asking. There is no problem that you can conceivably
331 have that other Narcotics Anonymous members have not had. The Narcotics Anonymous
332 program can help us to overcome or live with any problem. We all thought we were
333 somehow special or unusual. It was one mechanism we used for keeping ourselves isolated
334 and addicted. We were college graduates or we never finished high school or we were gay
335 or of the wrong social class or had extraordinary physical or emotional problems. We came
336 to see all of these as cop-outs. You will find as we did that recovering drug addicts are all
337 alike in the only way that matters. When you come into Narcotics Anonymous you are no
338 longer alone.

339 Narcotics Anonymous has meetings world-wide. If you travel, you will find you are
340 part of a great and growing Fellowship. The help is everywhere and is yours only for the
341 asking.

342 6. Meetings

343
344 "Go to meetings, meetings and more meetings," is the advice we get as newcomers,
345 "and when you're sick and tired of meetings go to still more meetings." One newcomer was
346 astonished to hear his sponsor tell him that he was so sick he needed meetings nine days a

347 week. In fact, the most frequent advice to newcomers is, "Go to ninety meetings in ninety
348 days."

349 The fact is, meetings form the basis of Narcotics Anonymous. Without meetings, we
350 would fail to function as an organization doing what we exist to do. For members of
351 Narcotics Anonymous, meetings are the single most important means of getting and staying
352 clean. Those of us who relapse into drug use have usually slowed down or stopped our
353 meeting attendance, and it seems those of us who attend meetings regularly have the most
354 well-balanced and gratifying recovery.

355 Meetings are to us what tools and materials are to a carpenter. They are the
356 materials with which we build a new life.

357 It is important for us to remember that the game of using occupied all our time (See
358 the section, "People, places and things: the game"). Even when we weren't using drugs we
359 were thinking about using drugs. When drugs and the game of getting them are taken from
360 our lives an enormous gulf opens within us. "What am I going to do with my time?" we
361 wonder. And the question is asked more in panic than in curiosity. It seems as though the
362 center has been yanked from our lives. We suddenly discover we don't know how to
363 behave with others, how to carry on a casual conversation or even where to put our hands--
364 without the reassuring roles using provided us.

365 It is meetings that fill up the gulf and work to change us. The effect they have on our
366 attitudes is unimaginable to one who has not experienced them. A member, now clean
367 many years, recalls his first year in the program. "Every day I felt suicidal. I would say to
368 myself, 'Well, I promised them I would do ninety meetings in ninety days. I'll go to a
369 meeting tonight and then I'll kill myself.' After I left the meeting I would wonder why I had
370 been so upset."

371 At meetings our fear is replaced with faith, self-pity with concern for others, despair
372 with hope, resentment with understanding, self-loathing with self-acceptance. We aren't
373 alone anymore; we are loved and valued and accepted for what we are and, above all,

understood for the first time in our lives by those who have been through what we have been through. No one sits in judgment of us. We experience continually the miracle that a problem shared is a problem halved. You will not find meetings to be advice bureaus, however. Many of our problems, perhaps most, have no handy, neat solutions. The solution, if there is any, lies in sharing the problem and applying the Steps. Through sharing it we grow. The problem may still be there, but we have grown a little beyond it.

Go, then, to meetings. Ninety meetings in ninety days is certainly good advice. At least get to several a week. You will be given a meeting list. That, a map, and determination are all you need. At first, we are stunned with the inconvenience of getting to and from all those meetings. "Several meetings a week? They're miles from where I live! I can't do that!" If you have such misgivings, we have a little mental exercise we would like you to try. Put yourself back in one of the darkest periods in your addiction. It's 2:30 in the morning and you're out of dope. You're withdrawing, and it's a bad one: the sweats, the shakes, the anxiety. Then you find out that, in a locker in a Greyhound bus station in a city fifty miles away, is a bundle waiting for you. It's chock full of your drug of choice, and it's all yours. Would you get there?

We ask you to travel several miles, not fifty, at 8 p.m., not 2:30 a.m. If you don't have a car or if public transportation isn't available you can usually find a member who will give you a ride. Ask around. Meetings are as essential to our staying clean as drugs were to using. We are simply too sick to survive otherwise. Without them, our recovery will be perilous and short-lived, hardly less of a nightmare than our using.

Let's talk about the format of the typical Narcotics Anonymous meeting. Our meetings generally open with the reading of a preamble which briefly describes the organization of Narcotics Anonymous and defines the purpose of its members. There are several kinds of meeting formats.

One of the most common kinds of meetings is the speaker-discussion meeting. During the first part of the meeting, the speaker, a Narcotics Anonymous member who has

01 accumulated some recovery time, shares their experience in recovery. Sometimes they
02 describe what their life was like before they came into Narcotics Anonymous and what it is
03 like now that they are clean. The purpose of the first part of their story is to put you, and
04 them, in touch with what using was like. The reason for such a talk is that we human beings
05 tend to forget pain easily. It is a psychological defense mechanism we use constantly.
06 Remembering two weeks later what it was like to burn our hand on a stove never conveys
07 the intensity the experience had for us at the time, nor the day after. This very human trait
08 has its advantages. What kind of life would it be if we were continually besieged with our
09 most painful past experiences, replayed in living color? A selective memory, however, can
10 work against our staying clean. We need to remember, if only briefly, what it was like to be
11 in jail, to wake up in an emergency ward, to endure the looks of disappointment on the
12 faces of our family and friends when they discover we had lied to them and
13 stolen from them. We do not wallow masochistically in our past. More often than not, the
14 recall of our using experiences that the speaker arouses in us is accompanied by a profound
15 gratitude. "Thank God I don't have to go through that again!"

16 Because of the differences in our backgrounds and the variety of substances we
17 abused, it is hardly likely that you will identify with all the facts of a speaker's story. Nor is
18 it necessary that you do so. Try, instead, to identify with their feelings. What does a
19 physician addicted to prescription drugs have in common with a street addict? Many
20 things. They both know, for example, what it feels like to be alone and desperate at 2:30 in
21 the morning, not clean but not really high either, out of drugs or unable to discover the
22 combination of drugs that will work.

23 It may happen, particularly when the speaker has not been clean a long time, that
24 their using story swells out to fill the whole talk. The speaker got in more fights, pulled off
25 more burglaries, dealt more dope, schemed more cleverly than anyone else. It occurs to us
26 that what the speaker is really doing is bragging. We call this kind of story a "meanest bag
27 in town story." Such stories are unfortunate, because no one can grow by telling them. It

means we're still stuck in the game (See "People, places, and things: the game").

Generally, as we continue to stay clean, our using experiences come to occupy their proper place in our talks. We get in touch with our recovery, with all the tremendous vitality and potential it opens up to us.

We can turn "meanest bag" stories to our advantage, however, when we are in the audience: We can use them to develop patience, a character trait that's always been in pretty short supply throughout our lives.

During the second half of the speaker's talk--the recovery part--we find how the speaker got clean. We hear about the tools that were used, the principles that were applied, to stay clean and to find some happiness in life. The profound message in this part of the talk is hope. We can identify with the speaker's addiction so perhaps we can identify with the recovery. "If the speaker is staying clean, so can I," the newcomer says. "There is hope for me."

The discussion part of the meeting provides us all with the chance to share. We may talk about the experiences or feelings we have in common with the speaker. We may talk about a living problem we are struggling with or we may use this as an opportunity to express gratitude for the rewards that staying clean has brought into our lives.

What, as a newcomer, should be your role in the discussion part of a meeting? You should speak if you can, but if not, don't use your silence to put yourself down. Many newcomers don't know whether they should speak or remain silent and they get involved in endless debates with themselves before, during and after the meeting about what they should or should not do. It's not healthy to work yourself up into such a state over the issue that you receive no spiritual help from the meetings, your very reason for attending them. You should go to meetings neither prepared to speak nor prepared to remain silent.

There's a message in that for us. We have tended all our lives to think in terms of what we should or should not do; what we have never done was to allow ourselves simply to be part of an experience, to give up our attempts at control. If we do this and if we have

5 spoken too little at meetings, we will then speak. If we have spoken too often, we can find
6 silence. Some new members are advised to take the cotton out of their ears and put it in
7 their mouths. One way of doing this is to get out of your own head and into the speaker's;
8 stop processing what you are going to say when your turn comes. You may find silence,
9 which can be an expression of your bond with other members, more meaningful to you than
0 anything you might say.

1 Another kind of meeting is the Step meeting. In these meetings we talk about ways of
2 applying the Twelve Steps (see the section, "Getting into the steps") to our daily lives.
3 These meetings may or may not have a speaker. If so, the speaker will tend to concentrate
4 on the particular step being discussed. When there is no speaker, program literature
5 dealing with the step is often read and a discussion follows in which those attending relate
6 their experiences with the step. Although the first couple of months of recovery are a little
7 early for you to be concerned about the detailed mechanics of applying some of the steps to
8 your life, you should start thinking in terms of the steps now and should include step
9 meetings in your schedule of meetings. There are a few steps you should begin working
0 immediately, particularly the First Step: "We admitted that we were powerless over our
1 addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable." Step meetings will help you learn to
2 apply the other steps in the proper sequence at the proper time.

3 It may happen that you find yourself unable to concentrate in a meeting. Perhaps
4 you're preoccupied with a living problem or you're anticipating something that's going to
5 happen next week. There's a useful little prayer you can use when this happens: "Lord,
6 help me to be here and help me to be now."

7 Sometime during the meeting a basket is passed. Narcotics Anonymous has no fees
8 or dues, as we told you, but we do have expenses we have to meet: literature, coffee
9 supplies, rent money. The money we pay for meeting space is usually symbolic, since the
0 institutions hosting our meetings—churches, very often—usually charge us minimal rent. It
1 signifies that recovering addicts can be financially responsible, that we have learned how to

use money in nondestructive ways. If you are working, you should give something. Reflect, as the basket passes you, on how much the program has given you and how little it asks in return.

Narcotics Anonymous meetings are classified as open or closed. Most meetings are closed, that is, open only to recovering addicts or those who think they may have a problem with drugs. Some are open, which means any concerned person who wishes to learn more about the program may attend and listen but participation is limited to addicts only. Doctors and other health workers and members of the family of recovering or still-using addicts often attend open meetings. It is always made clear which meetings are open meetings. You may wish to be more guarded in your comments at an open meeting.

At a closed meeting, of course, you talk about whatever you wish. It is very good self-discipline, however, to leave at a meeting what you hear at the meeting. It is better not to tell even other members of Narcotics Anonymous what you have heard. Even older members forget this important principle. We all need to remind ourselves of the privileged nature of what is revealed in a closed meeting.

Our meetings generally close with a prayer of our choice..

We have found it is good self-discipline to open and close our meetings on time. If you're late getting there, you'll be late for the meeting. Being frequently late to meetings is not a good sign; conversing with those near us during meetings is not a good sign; refusing to put money in the basket is not a good sign. (How much did a bundle of dope cost us?). These are all ways we express our anger and our rebellion. It's much better to confront these qualities head-on, like talking about them at a meeting.

7. People, places and things: the game

There is a saying one occasionally hears in Narcotics Anonymous, "Copping is more fun than using." Like many catchy sayings, it isn't entirely true. After all, drugs were always

09 our payoff. Yet there's enough truth in it to cause anyone once seriously into drugs to smile
10 in recognition

11 For us drugs were part of a "set." The glassine packets or pills or joints didn't just
12 grow on trees. Getting them required us to interact with people in specific situations. We
13 had to perform a series of more or less predictable acts--the trip to the doctor's office,
14 waiting for the connection and so forth--before the treasure was finally ours. For us drugs
15 have always been part of a complex series of activities. No good fairy ever said, "Here, take
16 this. Have a ball!"

17 Let us call the whole business of getting and using drugs--the waiting, the copping, the
18 dealing, even those activities necessary to finance the deal, burglary or robbery, and so
19 forth--the game, for lack of better word. When we first started using drugs, the game was
20 an annoying and frightening necessity, something we had to go through in order to get the
21 drugs we wanted. Our first experience with an imaginary medical complaint in the doctor's
22 office or a forged prescription or a burglary was terrifying. But as we kept playing the
23 game, something happened. We found we were beginning to enjoy it. We liked the
24 excitement if offered, the sense of power and getting over on people, the secretiveness, the
25 complex paraphernalia, the thrill of being outside the law and the gratifying feeling of
26 knowing exactly what we were doing. Toward the end, in fact, it was hard to tell whether
27 we were more addicted to the game or to the drug. The drug led to the game. the game led
28 to the drug.

29 One of the most difficult tasks we face in Narcotics Anonymous is in giving up the
30 game as well as giving up the drug. Faced with the somewhat terrifying prospect of
31 building a new life for ourselves, we are often confused about exactly what the rules are or
32 how everything should fit together. So it's natural that in moments of insecurity or self-
33 doubt our minds should return once more to the security of the game. Naturally, we're
34 never very objective when we're thinking this way. We tend to forget what it was like when
35 games and drugs blew up in our faces--the overdoses and jails and hospitals and suicide

attempts. Our memories are selective. We remember what it was like five or ten years before. Then we were in charge, and everything ran as smoothly as a car engine.

Getting the game out of our minds is more difficult than getting the drugs out of our bodies. And if we get back into the game our chances of survival are very poor. It's just too difficult to turn down the payoff.

At times the subject of the game surfaces in surprising ways at Narcotics Anonymous meetings. A member--clean a month or so--may admit he still occasionally deals. Another admits he copped and then threw the dope away. Someone clean a year has an inexplicable urge to visit a doctor's office and get a prescription--"just to see whether I could still do it." An ex-junkie experiences the overwhelming desire to shoot ice water into her veins. We have heard ex-junkies admit they were as addicted to the needle as to the heroin. It all shows what a hold the game has on us. As one member put it, drugs never come at us through the front door.

If we are to survive, we must push all aspects of the game out of our lives. The necessity for doing this is sometimes summed up in the warning phrase, "people, places, things." We must push out of our lives the people we used drugs with, those relationships within which using drugs was a natural thing to do, the places we hang out when we used drugs, and the things which our mind connects with drugs.

Each of us has to define for himself or herself the meaning of "people, places, things." We all know our own level of comfort. If we are honest and securely centered in the program we can usually, but not always, be aware of what constitutes a threat to us and act accordingly. Certainly, paraphernalia and the drugs themselves have to go. These are the first things we throw out.

The following story reveals that there may be hidden dangers. One member, clean six months, whose drug of choice was alcohol, found herself buying booze, pouring it out and lining the bottles up on her kitchen shelf. "It's just that I think the bottles are very decorative," she explained. But her sponsor wasn't convinced, and insisted she discard the

bottles. Bottles, of course, are paraphernalia. We are obsessed with paraphernalia. Can any of us walk past a head shop without closely inspecting the contents of the window?

Yes, the game and its trappings are cunning, baffling, and powerful. It will make every attempt to suck us back into it. It's not necessarily that we intend to be devious or underhanded, it's that we can't always spot our own game--although we do get better at it. The program is lifesaving because other people can spot our games, and if we are in constant and intimate personal contact with recovering addicts, we will not be ensnared. The minute we make a move toward the game, someone will call us on it. "Hey, that's a crazy thing to do!" This is where talking with a sponsor and talking at meetings can be particularly valuable.

Sometimes our bodies tell us when we are getting close to the game even when our minds refuse to recognize it. We often experience a definite physiological reaction, for instance, when we walk into a bar or a porno shop. We find our hearts beating faster, our stomachs filling with butterflies; perhaps our heads begin to buzz. Although alcohol may not have been our drug of choice, such a reaction in a bar is invariably a response to a game which is similar enough to our own to constitute a real threat to our staying clean (See the section, "Other addictions"). We must act accordingly. If we found a door going in, we can find a door leading out.

Generally, we must avoid personal contact with people we used drugs with. Carrying out the resolution to separate ourselves from them may involve for us some inconvenience and personal sacrifice. It may mean moving from the old neighborhood, changing jobs, or separating for the moment from some members of one's family. But nothing is more essential to our survival. These people can kill us as surely as if they assaulted us with a lethal weapon. They were our fellow players, and they want us back in the game.

"But," you may say, "what about personal loyalty? These people were my friends." Really? Ask yourself how many of them visited you when you were in a detox, or sent you cards or letters when you were in jail or a rehab? They do not have your best interests at

590 heart. They want you back, all right. Because you've been clean a little while, you've got
591 money, and you may be able to provide more than your share of drugs. You can bet they
592 don't want a recovering addict hanging around. If you call yourself an addict, and they
593 played the game with you, what does that make them? In ways subtle and not so subtle,
594 they will try to get you to use.

595 Imagine yourself participating in the following little scenario. You're the first
596 speaker.

597 "I'm staying clean now."

598 "Oh, that's great. We're really happy for you. Did you hear Jim's back? He's on the
599 street, though. Says the people at the rehab really screwed his head up. That's the same
600 place you went to, isn't it? I think he's still in love with you."

601 This brief interchange is typical of a thousand different possible situations whose
602 underlying purpose is always the same: we are being emotionally set up to use.

603 "But I can help Jim," is the usual first reaction. Jim can be helped, all right, but not by
604 you. He recognizes you only as a player of the game. He can get his help the same way you
605 got yours when he decides he wants it. There is one fact we constantly emphasize to
606 newcomers: You have to have it, to give it away, as the saying does. The newcomers in the
607 program are so swamped with their own problems that they simply can't manufacture help
608 for anyone else. Let the old timers provide the emergency relief. The only help you can
609 provide the still suffering addict right now is through the example of your own recovery.

610 We must constantly decide, often on a moment's notice, whether a particular event or
611 person constitutes part of people, places and things. An innocent office party may turn into
612 a marijuana and cocaine bash. Or you find yourself at a musical event where everyone else
613 is stoned. If we are cautious, however, such emergencies will occur only rarely. If we are
614 on firm spiritual ground, such behavior will strike us as more boring than anything else. If
615 you are in such a situation, remember telephones are everywhere, and you have a long list
616 of people who would like to hear from you. Moreover, if you read the section "Being

517 Assertive," you will learn some techniques for handling the pressures which arise.

518 Remember, you have the right to stay alive.

519 For the street addict, a street image is part of the role the game calls for. The long
520 hair, the street language, the macho stance (See the section, "Giving up roles: The toughest
521 kid on the block"). We may find ourselves hanging in places where the users hang, working
522 night shift in an all-night store or a pizza parlor, for instance. When we refuse to clean up
523 our dress, when we continue to use street language, when we insist on hanging out, what we
524 are really saying is this: "Look. I want to give up the drugs. But I can't give up the game.
525 It's the only thing I know. If I give it up, I may disappear." In short, we are afraid. To us,
526 no one comes across more afraid than an addict being tough.

527 Such addicts show a bullheaded resistance to the suggestion that they move from the
528 neighborhood. Their excuses for staying come so fast and furious that it is a sure sign they
529 are covering up. They find themselves being sucked into fights by street toughs and
530 rationalize the fighting: "Man, no one calls me that." What they can't explain is why they
531 are still living in an environment where fighting is such a natural thing to do.

532 We admit that such addicts do not necessarily relapse into using drugs, at least, not
533 immediately. But they have made the decision to resist change, and we know change is the
534 name of the only healthy game. These addicts are to be seen at meetings, bitterly unhappy,
535 battling everyone and everything, complaining ceaselessly about the very events and people
536 they have chosen to stay among. It takes all their energy to hide the fact that they are at
537 war with themselves and the spiritual principles of the program. They have made
538 themselves part of people, places and things.

539 Not infrequently, we have to admit that activities and situations which once gave us a
540 great deal of legitimate pleasure are part of people, places and things. Music which we
541 once genuinely loved listening to or playing has become infected with drug associations, or
542 a relationship in which there was at one time a great deal of love has become so damaged
543 that now the two people involved can only use the relationship to keep themselves sick.

54 You must take a long, hard, honest look at such holdovers from your using days. And
545 you must be prepared to make some tough decisions. We can say to you that it is better
5 perhaps not to think of giving something up. You should rather think of letting something
67 go, of letting it be outside your life, at least for a while. Narcotics Anonymous is a day-at-a-
648 time program. Meanwhile, you are getting involved with the program, meeting new friends,
679 exploring yourself, applying the steps to your life. All these activities will ease the pain of
650 separation.

651 All things change. Because music or relationship is part of people, places and things
652 today does not mean it will be a year from now. You may come to terms with the factors in
653 yourself which cause you to use the music in a self-punishing way, or the partner in the
654 relationship may decide to opt for a little change, too. In Narcotics Anonymous we have
655 witnessed some very miraculous rejoining.

56
57 8. Giving up roles: the toughest kid on the block

58
59 Naturally, to play a game requires a role. We liked a role because it gave us some
660 kind of power over people or events. We addicts, who seem to be manipulative by nature
661 and frightened that others may see us for what we are, are experts in adopting convincing
662 roles. Sometimes we hear members admit at a meeting the delight they felt on realizing
663 they were hooked on heroin. "I realized I was a junkie. Great. At last I knew what I was."

664 Our addiction provided us with a ready-made role in a ready made game. How
665 convenient! No growing pains, no problems in coming to terms with ourselves or others, no
666 need to establish priorities for our lives. We were the roles we played, and the only
667 priorities were the drugs we used. One woman could be a suffering and well-protected
668 housewife, another a hooker whose problem was never drugs, only the fact that all the men
669 in the world were so lousy. A man could be a dealer (actually, we all liked to imagine we
670 were dealers--maybe with extended runs of bad luck) and another a rough, gruff biker,

671 shaking his fist at the world. All these roles provided instant self-justification: We were
672 right and suffered heroically the fate of all visionaries; it was the world that was screwed
673 up. But we were really like the Wizard of Oz, frantically hoping that people would be so
674 impressed by the thunder we were making that they wouldn't notice the lonely, frightened
675 person working the controls inside.

676 At last, coming into the Narcotics Anonymous program, we have the chance to leave
677 the roles outside the door. What a relief, taking all that armor off. But scary, too! "If I'm
678 not that, I'm not anything," is our first reaction. But we are something, always have been,
679 even in our worst moments. We just haven't discovered it yet.

680 Often we have paid the heavy toll that role-playing demands: we've surrendered all
681 our positive feelings. "When I came into the program," one member recalls, "I could feel
682 only the savage emotions: anger and fear." But the person inside has those feelings in
683 safekeeping, ready to make a gift of them to us.

684 The tough image is one of the deadliest roles--streetwise, cool, mean; cynical, too.
685 Negativity is so much easier to hide behind than being positive: "Man, this world is screwed
686 up." People were to be used, hurt, conned, manipulated, got over on. Strange that all the
687 persons we damaged seem to have survived, flourished in fact. It's us whose lives are in
688 tatters. Who actually gets hurt? Look in the mirror sometime and ask the person there.

689 Of course, being tough isn't the only role an addict can play. Some of us played the
690 role of doormat ("watch me suffer!"), or the role of party-person, or sophisticate. But
691 whatever role we played, it was designed to keep people away, to keep them and us from
692 discovering what we were really like.

693 Of course, any role is difficult to give up. But you can do it. Ask yourself: Did you
694 really like yourself when you were playing a role? Did it get you what you really wanted?

695

96 9. Taking care of yourself

697
98 All of our lives it seems we have been looking for some kind of magic--some
99 complicated but easy way of getting our lives straightened out. But just when we thought
700 we had our situation figured out, analyzed to perfection, we found ourselves once again
701 sick, desperate, lonely. Figuring out what screwed us up never seemed to keep us from
702 getting screwed up. Imagine our surprise when we came into Narcotics Anonymous and
703 found a program for living that wasn't complicated and wasn't easy. It was simple and hard.
704 But it worked, where all of our beautiful and ingenious analyses had failed. And we
705 discovered an amazing fact: Getting straight doesn't involve accomplishing major things, it
706 just involves doing lots of little things on a daily basis.

707 Many of these things can be summed up in the phrase, "We learned to take care of
708 ourselves." This meant doing something we had never done before: establishing a daily
709 routine of activities which would increase our regard for ourselves as persons: making our
710 beds, shaving, showering, brushing our teeth, eating three reasonably balanced meals a day,
711 learning to budget our money, learning to cook, wearing neat clothes, getting the laundry
712 done, tidying up our environment, keeping appointments. Obviously, we never had time
713 for these things when we were using. We were too busy hustling. Who can eat on a meth
714 run, or brush one's teeth the morning after a drunken binge? Many are the times we
715 bought new underwear (or didn't wear any) because we couldn't get it together to do the
716 laundry. Frankly, we didn't like ourselves enough to take care of ourselves.

717 The above mentioned daily activities are more than just frills--they constitute the very
718 basis of our recovery because they form an organized structure within which the program
719 can work. We become dependable. Moreover, these activities establish who we are as
720 people. We become persons who are worth taking care of. The morning mirror becomes a
721 friend rather than an enemy, because the person in it is straight and, let's face it, loveable.

722 We can honestly say to the mirror, "You're not all I want you to be. You're not all you can
723 be, at least yet. But you look pretty good to me today!"

724 Sometimes a day comes along when we can't seem to manage even the smallest
725 responsibilities. We don't shave, we skip meals, show up for a meeting half-an-hour late,
726 miss an appointment. What we're really saying is "Today I don't like myself very much. I
727 don't even want to be this person. On days like this you can do something else you've
728 probably never learned to do. Be gentle with yourself. You don't have a failed life.
729 You're clean. You're a member of a loving Fellowship. The development of self-regard is
730 always a painful, uncertain process of taking three steps forward and two steps back. But
731 the time will come when nearly every day of the week is one when you can say, "Hey! I'm
732 O.K. I'm me!"

733
734 10. One day at a time

735
736 Most of us have tried, in the past, to quit using drugs. Whenever a crisis occurred
737 which was obviously created by our using, we would swear off, either for some fixed period
738 of time or, more ambitiously, forever. However, giving up drugs forever is exactly what the
739 addict cannot face doing; in fact, both quitting using (who but an addict would ever need to
740 quit using a particular drug?) and not being able to face a life without drugs are symptoms
741 of drug addiction (See the questionnaire in the section, "Are you an addict?").

742 What solution does Narcotics Anonymous offer the recovering addict trapped in this
743 dilemma? A very simple and effective one. We do not try to quit using drugs forever. We
744 simply try to quit using today. This is one of the healing paradoxes one encounters so often
745 in the program ("You have to surrender to win," and "You can have something only if you
746 let go of it," are others). If we manage to get through today without using drugs, tomorrow
747 will take care of itself. There is a saying that the world's longest journey begins with one
748 step. We view the path of recovery as being made up of small, easily-handled individual

steps. If you have not used a drug today, you are as surely on the road to recovery as someone who, in length of clean time, is far ahead of you. And, furthermore, anyone can quit using drugs for one day.

It is not only the addict who can benefit from applying this principle to life. No one likes to think of a commitment that lasts forever, even the most ordinary ones. The thought of having to make one's bed every morning or to eat three meals a day, come rain or come shine, for the rest of one's life is unpleasant for anyone. All healthy people have learned to view their lives as centered in one day, today, the only day we can do anything about. One of our members recalls seeing on a signboard outside a church in Dayton, Ohio the following prayer, "Lord, help me not to look back in anguish nor forward in fear, but around in awareness." The idea behind this prayer is one all Narcotics Anonymous members should adopt as a supreme principle of living. It is the one great source of all that is constructive in our lives. Almost always, when we are in the emotional doldrums, depressed, anxious or afraid, it is because we have forgotten this vital principle (It is interesting that "a day at a time" is a basic rule for living found in all the major religions: "Let this day be sufficient to the needs thereof.").

One member recalls talking at a meeting about his fear of getting old. A woman replied, "I would be afraid of getting old, too. But there's no way I can seem to squeeze it into my day at a time program."

The "one day at a time" tool is particularly helpful in handling the craving for drugs or the symptoms of withdrawal from drugs that the newcomer faces. We need only handle the craving or discomfort for one day, today. We may need to break the day down into smaller units of time, depending on our level of distress: one hour, one-half an hour, ten minutes, five minutes.

For addicts who have great difficulty being in the moment, living in small time intervals can be an unfamiliar and baffling experience. But we can learn to do it. The following story, told by a member whose drug of choice was marijuana, is typical. "I got up

6 in the morning craving a joint worse than I ever had before. I told myself, I will not smoke
7 a joint for two hours. At the end of the two hours, I told myself the same thing again. I
8 went about the day as usual, taking it in two hour intervals. The next thing I knew it was
9 time to go to bed. I hadn't smoked that day."

0 Many other problems will yield to the same approach: trying to overcome other types
1 of compulsive behavior, eating or gambling, for instance; working through a collapsing
2 romance; enduring ongoing physical pain. Much in our lives and in our personalities that
3 is wrong will benefit from the "one day at a time" rule.

4 Sometimes the following prayer can be seen on the wall of a meeting room: "Lord,
5 help me to believe that there is nothing that will happen to me today that you and I
6 together can't handle." Thus, even the important matter of faith, faith in ourselves, faith in
7 the program, faith in God, can be handled on a daily basis.

8 Just as important, living a day at a time gives us a heightened appreciation of the
9 many good things that come to us in recovery. To surrender ourselves to the pleasures and
10 rewards of life's good moments was something we never learned to do. We were always
11 dwelling on the doom and gloom ahead. The next time you are doing something you really
12 enjoy, whether it's going to a movie or camping or dancing or spending an evening with
13 friends, try to keep yourself in the here and now. At such times you may find your mind
14 wandering off into obscure worries about the future. But when this happens, you must pull
15 yourself back into the present. With practice, living in the now gets easier. And it brings
16 with it a profound awareness of the benefits of staying clean.

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28 11. What to do about the obsession
29

00 When some of us come into Narcotics Anonymous we immediately lose the desire to
01 take drugs. For others, early days in the program are an ongoing battle with the obsession
02 to use. Most of us take a place between these two extremes. Normally we don't think of

using, but when our thinking gets confused, when we become angry, resentful, or self-pitying, or when we wander too close to our game, the desire to use drugs may hit us. In intensity the desire may vary all the way from a mild curiosity to a heart-pounding hunger. We usually obsess about our drugs of choice, but occasionally we have an obsession for a drug we have never used. We may become momentarily fascinated by the rituals associated with a strange drug and see them as an escape from our situation. The pill addict, for example, may think of shooting heroin. Trying to handle a broken romance usually presents us with the severest trials of all, since we tend to use the romantic involvements themselves as a sort of drug.

Often we regard the obsession for drugs as something foreign to us and unwelcome, somewhat like possession by demons. However, when you think about it, what could be more natural than a drug addict thinking about drugs? The fact that we react in such a frightened way to these thoughts means that once again we have become threatened by our feelings and are frantically looking for a way to control them. It's a good rule of thumb, though, that we feel the way we're supposed to feel, given our situation. In this, as in other predicaments, you should try to trust your basic functions.

Obviously, we members of Narcotics Anonymous have survived many such obsessions; we are clean today, and perhaps we are stronger and more self-reliant because of them. We may value our recovery more, since we generally don't put too much store in things that come easily.

However, we have found a number of techniques that are useful for handling the obsession for drugs. Not all these suggestions apply to every situation; you should familiarize yourself with them so you can use them in those situations in which they are appropriate.

#1: If you are in a situation where your recovery is threatened, get out! You should not be around drugs, or around fellow players of your game: They don't have your best

29 interests in mind. Why you got into such a situation isn't important now. You can
30 discuss that later with your sponsor. What is important is to leave.

31 #2: Call your sponsor. You need another human being to talk to, one who loves you, who
32 does have your best interest in mind. That's what your sponsor's there for (See
33 "Sponsorship").

34 #3: Eat something, preferably a nutritious snack, for instance, a high protein food. We
35 often crave drugs at moments when our blood sugar is low, usually in the late
36 afternoon. In our addiction we conditioned ourselves to take drugs to provide that
37 kick the energy of food would have given us. To most of us, the idea of using drugs
38 after eating is less appealing. If you have a weight problem, you should exercise
39 discretion, of course. Talk with your sponsor about it.

40 #4: Use the day-at-a-time idea, or break it down even further (See the section, "One day
41 at a time)."

42 #5: Say the Serenity Prayer (See the section, "Prayer, the spiritual part"). Also use any
43 other prayers you can think of. "Lord, relieve me of this obsession." Since the mind
44 can accommodate only a single thought, if you're praying, you won't be thinking about
45 getting high.

46 #6: Try to accept the way you feel. Given your situation, your feelings are inevitable. As
47 we continue in our recovery, our cravings for drugs get further apart and weaker in
48 intensity. Most of our members lose the desire to use. We have a saying, "Leave
49 drugs alone and they'll leave you alone."

50 #7: Talk about it at a meeting. The discussion part of meetings often opens with the
51 chairperson asking, "Did anyone think of using drugs today?" Jump right in there: No
52 one is going to judge you, and few people end up using who go to a meeting and talk
53 about it.

54 #8: As in everything else that happens to you, remember that you are a worthwhile
55 person and that you are no longer alone.

856 If you find yourself thinking about drugs regularly, then you are doing something
857 wrong or failing to do something right. You may be staying too close to your game. or
858 persistently doing something to keep yourself screwed up mentally, physically or spiritually.
859 Make an appointment with your sponsor, sit down and review your lifestyle openly and
860 freely. Your sponsor may be able to spot your game when you can't, or determine that you
861 are engaged in some ongoing self-willed behavior. A few of us found that our obsession for
862 drugs went away when we stopped our self-willed and obsessive behavior. For the addict
863 who wants to get comfortable with himself, any kind of systematic dishonesty has to go.

864 Some of the other ways we can provoke our craving for drugs on an ongoing basis is
865 summed up in the expression, HALT, which stands for the phrase: "Never get too

866 Hungry

867 Angry

868 Lonely, or

869 Tired."

870 We may skip meals (for the recovering addict, this amounts to self-destruction). (See
871 the section, "Diet and exercise") We may harbor an ongoing resentment. We may have
872 become isolated from others, particularly people in the program. We may not be getting
873 sufficient sleep. All of these things endanger our recovery.

874
875 12. Sponsorship
876

877 When talking to a newcomer, most people in the program emphasize three things:
878 "Don't use. Go to meetings. Get a sponsor." The first two are self-explanatory. But what
879 is a sponsor? What does he do?

880 A sponsor is an experienced member of the program who will act as a guide in your
881 new life, share their experience in working the Twelve Steps, and help you to avoid some of
882 the problems we encounter in recovery. Experience is essential in a sponsor. If they are to

83 help you to avoid problems and share similar experiences, it helps if they have traveled the
84 path before you. However, no rule can be laid down about the amount of clean time your
85 sponsor should have. Some members of the program cannot function as sponsors no
86 matter how long they have been clean. Others can build a good working relationship with
87 the sponsee after less than a year's recovery time. Whether members can be a good
88 sponsor or not is entirely dependent on the quality of recovery, rather than on the person's
89 talent for sponsorship. All of us know of instances of sponsors whose lives are in disarray,
90 and yet whose advice to those they sponsor is solid, comprehensive, and capable of being
91 easily understood and acted on.

92 If we find ourselves unwilling to get a sponsor, it is a warning that we are on
93 dangerous ground. It is often a sign that we have some destructive behavior we want to
94 protect, stealing on the job, for example, or compulsive sexual activity. A sponsor will force
95 us to examine our behavior, which is exactly what we want to avoid. Moreover, failing to
96 get a sponsor is a way of staying uncommitted to the program, of staying on the fence.
97 Most of us harbor a great deal of ambivalence about our recovery--we want all the pain to
98 go away but not all the highs, please! We imagine that by masterminding our own recovery
99 and doing things our own way we can choose what we want from both worlds--from staying
100 clean or from using. It doesn't work. We come only to experience the terrible pain of not
101 belonging anywhere. Our using friends feel uncomfortable around us and the people in the
102 program can't reach us through our protective shield. But there's one way out of this
103 painful dilemma. Climb down off the fence! Remember, if your way was so good, what are
104 you doing in Narcotics Anonymous?

105 Strangely, you alone must be the judge of the quality of your prospective sponsor's
106 recovery. It is one of the continuing miracles of the program that the right sponsor usually
107 finds the right sponsee. But we can give you some practical advice.

First, if you are a man, get a male sponsor. If you are a woman, find a female. The opportunities for manipulation, role playing, destructive romance, and sexual adventuring are too great in mixed sponsorships. We have almost never seen them work out.

Secondly, don't be too hasty in choosing a sponsor. Attend meetings and pay particular attention to the members who seem to be speaking to your condition, the ones who, from what they say before or in conversations after meetings, seem to understand what you are going through. Charm, robust humor, and a talent for telling clever using stories may be false virtues. Do you pick a doctor because he tells good jokes? Above all, the sponsor should be deadly serious when he talks about the program. He should make it clear to you that he believes working the program on a pick and choose basis is not acceptable--a step here, a meeting there. When you ask him to be your sponsor, you may well hear something like "O.K. But I expect you to do certain things. Go to ninety meetings in ninety days. Call me every day. Then we'll start looking at the steps--the third and the fourth in particular." About this time you may feel your stomach sinking. "What have I gotten myself into?" Relax. If you have such a sponsor, you're on your way to getting better.

Thirdly, once you have a sponsor, use him! He will probably give you telephone numbers where he can be reached both day and night, and he will expect you to contact him on a regular basis. It is highly unlikely that you can over-use your sponsor in your first year of recovery. Don't worry about whether you are pestering him. We stay clean by helping the newcomer.

A member of the program recently described the difference between the way a newly recovering addict and an ordinary person deal with the crisis of a flat tire. The Narcotics Anonymous member stops, walks around the car three times, and hikes five miles to a phone to call his sponsor. The ordinary person fixes the tire.

A sponsor is there not only to advise you but also to listen. For many of the growing pains we experience in staying clean, the only solution is a willing listener. The idea that

every human problem has a clear-cut solution is a false idea that is prevalent in a society like ours that tends to see human problems from a technological point of view. An old saying is, a problem shared is a problem halved. The point of the anecdote about the flat tire is that although you will eventually have to repair your tire and you certainly can't expect your sponsor to do it, what you need now is human contact, someone to say "Hey! That's too bad."

On the other hand, your sponsor may give you specific advice, particularly about program matters. Try to be open to his advice. Try, in fact, to act against the negativity that has infected your whole life, the feeling we always get that "This isn't going to do any good." It certainly won't do any good if you don't do it! Most of the "solutions" we so eagerly embraced in the past turned out to be problems instead. Remember, feelings are not facts, and it is not necessary for you to believe something is going to work for it to work. Prayer is a good example.

The person you ask to sponsor you may turn you down. Don't be discouraged. It in no way reflects your qualities as a person or your suitability for the program. Program members who end up sponsoring too many newcomers find that their own needs are not being met. If someone tells you this, he has done you a favor. Keep looking. You will find the sponsor intended for you.

Should you have more than one sponsor? Generally not. If we find ourselves going to two or more people for advice we are probably looking for the advice that will agree with what we already want to do. Being responsible to one person is a way of safeguarding ourselves from our manipulative natures.

At the end of two months or so you should probably have chosen a sponsor. If you allow it, your sponsor can be invaluable to your growth in the program. In many of the sections of this book, a recurring piece of advice is, "Talk with your sponsor about this." A sponsor is the way we keep our feet on the ground and avoid becoming the victim of our own schemes and hasty actions.

962 Though you will find your sponsor's help invaluable, you should be aware of the
963 limitations of sponsorship. Your sponsor is not Superman. He or she is not a counselor or
964 psychologist, a social caseworker, a lending agency, a doctor or lawyer. Your sponsor is a
965 recovering addict, just as you are, who is a little further down the road than you. The word
966 "mentor" describes, perhaps, the role better than any other. The word derives from the
967 same Greek word. Mentor was Odysseus' trusted and faithful friend. The operative word
968 is "trusted." Trust is an essential ingredient in your relationship with your sponsor. You
969 must be able to confide in your sponsor. Thoughts, feelings, past actions you have always
970 hesitated to tell anyone else about, you must be able to share with your sponsor who will
971 understand the privileged nature of what you say. Whatever you tell your sponsor is
972 classified in program language as Fifth Step material (See the section, "Getting into the
973 steps"). It is for this reason that your relationship with your sponsor promotes your
974 sponsor's growth. It is a sign of our maturity when we can keep confidences and forego the
975 attention and the cheap thrills that indulging in gossip gives us.

976 There is, generally, a trial period in which you and your sponsor feel each other out,
977 just as a new swimmer tests out the water. During your first meetings you will be
978 embarrassed, nervous, and eager for your sponsor to like you. However, you will quickly
979 find yourself working into a routine in which your conversations are more spontaneous and
980 relaxed.

981 As your relationship grows, your sponsor will develop a sixth sense about you as a
982 person, knowing when you need a listener and when you need advice. He or she can sense
983 when you're unhappy or when you're in difficulty. Soon you will probably spend an evening
984 with your sponsor without dwelling on your problems. When this happens, your sponsor is
985 becoming more than a sponsor--becoming, in fact, a friend.

986 At times you may find yourself critical of the things your sponsor does or says. You
987 may occasionally detect an apparent insensitivity to your problems or an impatience with
988 your progress. You're discovering your sponsor is a human being, a struggling addict

89 trying, like you, to get well. If you are like most of us, you will find a deep friendship
90 emerging out of your relationship with your sponsor; but it will be a real friendship,
91 something you have perhaps never experienced before, one hewn out of the rough
92 imperfect material that we humans bring to friendships, not one of the ideal relationships
93 that existed only in our drug fantasies. It is something worth fighting and struggling for.
94 You may find yourself sulking, vowing to get a sponsor who really understands you, even
95 throwing a temper tantrum and, we hope, ultimately apologizing. And you will find your
96 apology accepted. For the program offers us a priceless gift: the ability to amend
97 relationships, something quite foreign to our using experience, where anger with a friend
98 was a sufficient reason for us to write a friendship off forever. If we are determined to
99 become human, an argument with a friend--even your sponsor--can be a blessing in
100 disguise. Friendships, like everything else, are not perfect.

101 That is a great lesson you can learn from sponsorship, the lesson that you are both
102 human beings and that being human is good enough. The miraculous thing is that, in the
103 mass of shortcomings and imperfections that make up the Narcotics Anonymous
104 Fellowship, we can find all the love, healing, and strength we need.

105 Although it is very unlikely, something may happen to destroy the feeling of trust you
106 have for your sponsor. Your sponsor relationship should not have been an exclusive one--
107 you will have established other deep relationships in the program which can support you if
108 this happens. It may be necessary for you to choose another sponsor. It is important not to
109 judge or fix blame. You will grow if you can resist doing so.

110 All your major decisions and activities should be discussed with your sponsor:
111 quitting smoking, taking a new job, making substantial expenditures, changing your
112 schedule of meetings, getting involved in new social activities, emotional involvements. It
113 is wise to always remember that a part of us is working against our recovery. How often
114 have we seen the newcomer inform the sponsor a week or so after committing him or
115 herself to an expensive anti-smoking program or buying a motorbike or car or dropping

6 certain meetings. When we act impulsively and secretively, our worse nature is winning
17 out. Whenever we act first and discuss it with our sponsors later we are keeping an
18 important part of ourselves unavailable to the program.

19
20 13. Pray: It's a spiritual program

21
22 The newcomer has read the words "God" and "prayer" a number of times in this book,
23 and has undoubtedly heard them mentioned at meetings. Often the expression "my higher
24 power," or simply, more slangily, "my H.P." is used (The expression comes from our Second
25 Step, "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity").

26 The newcomer may have greeted these words with silent distaste and contempt, or
27 even with fear ("Please don't let this be a religious trip!"). Was Narcotics Anonymous,
28 despite the evidence of recovery all around us, going to be just another blind alley? Would
29 we end up disillusioned and defeated once again, saying "I was into Narcotics Anonymous
30 for two years" the same way we had said "I was into meditation for two years" or "I was into
31 group for two years"?

32 Actually, behind our attitude about religion and God there was a fear, a fear we
33 would later recognize to be a central fear in the addictive personality, the fear of loss of
34 control. We felt that if we allowed God, even for a moment, to enter our lives we would
35 lose control.

36 To begin with, let us assure you that Narcotics Anonymous does not want you to be
37 any person other than the person you can most respect. In fact, it is not possible for us to
38 be a person who is driven or possessed or for whom we have contempt and still stay clean.
39 No reasonable program for living will make you into someone you cannot live with; it's our
40 addiction that did that.

41 It is our decision what to do with the raw substance of spirituality that will make it
42 good or bad for us. Narcotics Anonymous will not require you to be religious--it hardly

43 could, for religion means totally different things to different people. Narcotics Anonymous
44 only wants you to be open minded about applying a universal set of principles (they didn't
45 originate with us; they are very old), sometimes called Spiritual principles, to your daily
46 life. What these principles are we will explore in the chapter, "Getting into the steps."
47 Right now we expect you to do very little, no more than you can reasonably do.

48 Why the emphasis on spirituality in the Narcotics Anonymous program? Wouldn't it
49 be better off without it, more "scientific?" The accusation of "religiosity" is a way some
50 people put Narcotics Anonymous down--particularly disgruntled addicts who have returned
51 to using. "Oh, Narcotics Anonymous; I couldn't go for all that God stuff." However, very
52 thoughtful persons other than addicts have seen the connection between felt spiritual needs
53 and addiction. We wish there were something out there with which we could unite
54 ourselves, something that could make us whole.

55 At the start of our using we may have told ourselves boastfully, "What idiot could
56 believe in God?" The point is, then we already had a god: the packet, the pill, the joint,
57 the bottle. But as our addiction progressed and we came to find less getting high in getting
58 high, our god seemed to have left us hanging. At this point something in us wants a God
59 that will work for us, rather than against us. These desires, if they occur, are healthy: They
60 mean there is a part of us that wants to get well.

61 One new member recalls a wise piece of advice from his sponsor: "If you want to grow
62 spiritually it is wise to re-evaluate, forget all you've heard about God and religion."
63 Perhaps Narcotics Anonymous can be thought of as a do-it-yourself God kit: we discover
64 as we stay clean a loving God who provides us the strength to continue to stay clean. That
65 a God exists which can give us direction and stability rather than the curses of guilt and
66 emotional pain is one of the greatest rewards of the program. It has been our experience
67 that Narcotics Anonymous members need God and they need people. We can only find
68 one through the other.

What do you do? At the start, very little. One suggestion is to begin by using three small prayers. It isn't necessary for you to define the word "God" to use them--that may take the rest of your life to do--nor is it necessary for you to believe they will work, although we will give you some reasons why we think they work that have no obvious connection with God or spiritual matters. After all, it isn't necessary for you to believe the lights will go on when you flip the switch for it to happen.

1) Start each day with the prayer, "God, help me to stay clean today."

This prayer centers us for the day; it reminds us of who we are (recovering addicts) and what our priorities are (staying clean). It reminds us that we are not alone in a hostile universe, that there are sources of help outside us. Our recovery does not have to be our own project.

2) During the day, if you are confronted with a difficult living problem, the craving for a drug, or any painful emotion, you will find the following prayer helpful (the Serenity Prayer):

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

3) At night, before going to bed, say "God, thank you for keeping me clean today." This reminds us to be grateful. It reminds us that no matter what else happened, for us the day was a success; we stayed clean. That was all we had to do, and we did it. The day may have been a good one, full of successes and accomplishments, or a rotten one--we were angry and afraid and hassled by one failure after another. These things are simply not important. This day was a success: We stayed clean.

As much as the help these prayers will give us we need the self-discipline of uttering them. We need to be reminded that we can do simple things, that we can act on our own needs and take direction. We no longer have to be our own worst enemies.

14. Doing everything overnight

Addicts are impatient people: impatient to make the connection, impatient to take the dope, impatient with the quality of the high. It has often been remarked that one can pick addicts out from among ordinary people just by noticing how rapidly they consume even harmless beverages like sodas and coffee. This impatience carries over into our recovery and is one of the greatest enemies of our growth and stability.

Sometimes impatience shows itself in the way we establish unrealistic goals. Once we get our feet on the ground, we find dozens of things consuming as much of our energy as building our recovery and working on ourselves. Suddenly it is desperately important that we repair a long damaged relationship, return to school, get a better car or job, quit smoking. Even our recovery is the object of our impatience: We want five years of being clean overnight, or at the least, we spend a great deal of time fantasizing about the profound wisdom we will spread among an admiring Fellowship with our first anniversary talk.

As a recovering addict your first commitment should be to the program. You should avoid making major decisions and changes too early in your recovery. The new member, during his or her first year or so, should not try to do too much more than stay clean. Most important changes must take place within us, and the fact is that unless we put our recovery first in any and every situation, we will never be able to get or hold onto those things we would put before it. Engaging in causes and ill-advised grandiose projects has spelled tragedy for too many of us. At this point we must leave great schemes and the management of the world to those better equipped to handle them. Remember where you came from--the accidents, hospitals, jails, overdoses, the nightmares and terrors--and compare that with where you are today. This mental exercise can always help us to relax any unrealistic demands we have on life.

1 1 One common mistake made by the newcomer who is not already a full-time student is
122 returning to school too soon. We may fall into the unfortunate habit of comparing
123 ourselves with those we went to high school or college with but who didn't become addicts.
124 They graduated, we didn't. Their lives are orderly and apparently successful; ours are
125 chaotic and screwed up. Suddenly we find it terribly important to get that lost high school
126 diploma or college degree and to do it as quickly as possible. We want to make up for lost
127 time. We may run to the nearest community college, register for a full load of courses in
128 night school, purchase large quantities of books and supplies, and study frantically for two
129 or three weeks. Meetings and program contacts take the back seat in this rush program for
130 self-improvement. What we find is that we simply cannot cut it. We have not developed
131 the habits of patience, perseverance and self-discipline that a successful program of study
132 while working full-time requires. Hurt and disillusioned, we end up dropping out of school
133 once again. If we are lucky, we escape with our recovery intact.

134 Actually, program members tend to make excellent students—when they take up a
135 judiciously chosen program of study at the proper time in their recovery. They are often
136 articulate, insightful about human problems and conditions, and energetic. Their
137 experiences in the program have given them a maturity, compassion and view of the world
138 that the ordinary student may well lack. But the readiness must be waited for, it can't be
139 forced. This is another instance of where merely staying clean and working the Narcotics
140 Anonymous program will prepare us to accomplish seemingly unrelated activities in the
141 future. Remember that not many things of lasting value can be done quickly.

142 You should discuss your plans thoroughly with your sponsor to avoid making
143 impulsive decisions and committing yourself to a program of study you may not be able to
144 carry out. You should start out small, taking, say, a single course in night school. If you
145 find you don't like the school or the material or aren't yet ready for it, the damage done is
146 slight. You can try again later. Above all, you will not have severed your lifeline with the
147 program. Contact with those in the program who have returned to school successfully is

148 important, too. Why repeat the mistakes of others, and more significantly, why not learn
149 from their successes?

150 Inability to find a job or to get the right job is another source of dissatisfaction to
151 many new members. The point is that a clean addict without a job is better off than the
152 using addict with a job. You can work a boring job even among those you resent and stay
153 clean; you may even be the better for it. An unsatisfactory working environment offers us
154 many opportunities to come to terms with ourselves and with others. Tolerance,
155 compassion, and putting oneself in the other person's shoes aren't qualities that can be
156 learned in a vacuum. And the workplace is one of the best proving grounds for program
157 principles. Many of us discovered that our co-workers and boss improved, unaccountably,
158 the longer we stayed clean.

159 When is the right time to seek a better job? Most of us have discovered that the right
160 job comes along when we are ready for it. In our recovery we meet many people inside and
161 outside the program. Often the people we meet notice the personal qualities the program
162 has brought into our lives. They may be impressed by our eventemperedness, our maturity,
163 our insight. Very often these personal contacts result in job offers. No area of our recovery
164 is as full of strange coincidences and little miracles as this. In our working lives, as well as
165 in so many other areas of our recovery, it is good to bear in mind the maxim: "When the
166 patient is ready, the doctor will arrive."

167 The pursuit of things--whether car, house, clothing, or motorcycle--is another way we
168 can sabotage our recovery. There is nothing inherently wrong with having nice things:
169 Buying something for ourselves can be one of the rewards of the program, and even an act
170 of self-respect, a way of saying, "I deserve this." Like so many other issues the true solution
171 here lies in moderation--the golden mean. Nothing makes us feel quite as much like using
172 as acquiring a possession for which we aren't yet ready. There is the feeling of stimulation
173 that ownership gives followed by the sense of being cheated after we tire of the toy--in
174 other words, we're saddled with exactly the same set of feelings that caused us to search for

175 a more lasting and powerful high. Often, in a panic, we buy yet something else and see, in
176 horror, a whole new pattern of compulsive behavior begin to emerge in us. We find
177 ourselves spending to change our moods.

178 One newcomer impatiently asked his sponsor, "When will I be ready for a new car?"
179 His sponsor replied, "When you no longer want it so much."

180 There is much to be said for that answer. Addicts don't make very good materialists.
181 We need God and we need people, and material possessions don't have much to do with
182 either. Our real problems don't stem from the things we lack, but from what we are or
183 aren't as human beings. Our true talents are for working with and helping other people, for
184 developing our potential and seeking growth. That's why a sense of betrayal always
185 accompanies compulsive spending.

186
187 16. Being assertive

188
189 How often have you found yourself saying yes when you wanted to say no? Or
190 suffering a bad meal in a restaurant or sloppy service in a store and saying nothing?

191 Addicts, perhaps more than others, find it difficult to communicate their feelings and
192 define their space to other people. Addicts have spent their lives mastering the fine art of
193 people pleasing. Occasionally we tried to please others in order to get something we
194 wanted, but that wasn't usually the reason. We didn't really like ourselves very much, and
195 that's why it was so important that others liked us. Isolated and always feeling on the
196 outside of any group, we doubled our efforts to get the approval of others. Then maybe we
197 wouldn't feel so lonely; then we would feel we belonged.

198 If we are to stay clean this life-long habit of people pleasing must come to a halt.
199 There are times when our very survival depends on our ability to say no: "No, I don't use,"
200 or "No, I don't want a drink." It's something none of us are very good at to start with, but it
201 gets easier with practice, like anything else.

02 Defining your own space--letting others know what your wants, needs and feelings
03 are--is called being assertive. It's not being aggressive; that means violating the rights of
04 others. Being assertive means asserting your own rights. It is an essential part of our
05 recovery--we are no longer anyone else's doormat.

06 What are some of your rights? Among others:

- 07 1) You have the right to ask a question. (How many times have you accepted an
08 explanation from someone else when you didn't really understand it?)
- 09 2) You have the right to say "your behavior (or this situation) makes me uncomfortable."
- 10 3) You have the right to change your mind.
- 11 4) You have the right to say, "I don't know."
- 12 5) On the positive side, you have the right to say, "You're important to me," or "I love
13 you."

14 Being assertive does not mean that you get into the other person's behavior or take
15 his inventory. It means you talk about how you feel. "My steak was overdone. I wanted it
16 medium rare." Flying into a fit of rage--which often caused us to get drunk or use at
17 someone--doesn't count as assertive behavior, although at one time it was the only way we
18 knew to express dissatisfaction. Assertiveness is done without temper. Why should we get
19 angry when we are talking only about our feelings and needs?

20 Being assertive can be a great help in handling problems which arise around socially
21 accepted drugs like alcohol, or increasingly, marijuana. Situations where drugs are being
22 used we must, in general, avoid like the plague. Alcohol, however, because of the fact that
23 it is socially accepted and legal, presents special problems. We will usually avoid heavy
24 drinking parties and bars (See "People, places and things"). However, events like dinner
25 parties where the host serves wine, weddings, or business parties are part of life. Our
26 recovery is on shaky ground if we cannot function comfortably in such situations. The
27 Narcotics Anonymous program guarantees us fullness of life.

228 Here's how you can be assertive. Stop the drink before it's put in your hand. "I don't
229 care for wine, thank you," or "Yes, I will have something. How about a ginger ale?" In a
230 restaurant, when the waiter is taking orders for cocktails, many program members order
231 coffee. Sometimes we're asked why we don't drink (But not so often as you may imagine.
232 After we get clean we discover a lot of people neither use nor drink). Remember, you have
233 the right not to explain yourself. A simple "It doesn't agree with me," satisfies nearly
234 everyone. Those clean a long time in the program are quite assertive, even business-like,
235 about their refusal. "I don't drink. It caused me problems at one time." At any rate you
236 don't have to explain any further, and you certainly don't have to take a drink to soothe
237 someone's ruffled feelings. Anyone who seems to be pleading a special cause by getting
238 you to take a drink has a problem. You may see that person at a meeting soon.

239 You might ask yourself how you would handle the two following situations:

- 240 1) You are looking forward eagerly to your first date with a person to whom you're very
241 attracted. You very much want everything to go right. On getting in the car the
242 person lights up a joint.
- 243 2) A person from your using past calls you, knowing you have a spare room. He or she
244 wants to stay with you "until I can get on my feet."

245 Of course, handling such situations is not easy. However, learning to be assertive in
246 little situations--in restaurants, stores, and with strangers--makes it easier to be assertive in
247 important situations. Above all, in situations such as the above which may constitute a
248 threat to your recovery, get in touch as soon as possible with someone in the program.
249 Their clearheadedness and objectivity may give you the courage to say, "Look, it bothers me
250 when someone smokes around me," or "It's not convenient for me to let you stay here."

52 17. Alcohol vs. addiction

53
54 Sometimes a new member in the program holds onto the idea that he can drink
55 alcoholic beverages safely. That is not living clean. Alcohol is a drug, a depressant,
56 chemically similar, in fact, to the solvents used in glue--substances which any of us will
57 admit have the potential for grave addiction. Just as we abused pills or other drugs, we will
58 abuse alcohol.

59 Our Basic Text states that "Thinking of alcohol as different from other drugs, has
60 caused a great many addicts to relapse. Before we came to N.A. many of us viewed alcohol
61 separately, but we cannot afford to be confused about this. Alcohol is a drug. We are
62 people with the disease of addiction who must abstain from all drugs in order to recover."

63 Those of us unwilling to give up alcohol do so--we think--for two reasons. First,
64 alcohol is a unique drug whose use is socially reinforced and rewarded. The fact that it
65 forms the basis of comforting social rituals--weddings, cocktail hours, parties--makes us
66 think of alcohol as necessary for normal living. The recovering addict--with his damaged
67 sense of self and his tendency to define himself by the way others see him--may think of
68 alcoholic beverages as something that will restore him to normalcy, or make him part of the
69 crowd. Secondly, using alcohol is a way the addict can express his rebellion toward the
70 program and his own recovery: "This I will not give up!" Each of us holds on to certain
71 things, and will give them up only when it becomes overwhelmingly clear that they are
72 damaging our lives and are in fact part of our disease of addiction.

73 In recovery we find that responsibility is not opposed to freedom, but is an essential
74 part of it. The quality of our lives is determined by our love for ourselves and others, not
75 by the chemical substances we use.

76

18. I'll never sleep again

Let's say you've been clean a week. It's 3:30 in the morning. You've been tossing and turning, unable to sleep. Vague fears and feelings of eeriness plague you. The once familiar and comfortable room now seems strange. You sit up on the edge of the bed, your heart pounding. What can you do? Call your sponsor? That seems silly and besides you wouldn't want to wake him. "I'll never get to sleep, you may be thinking. "I'll go crazy."

Difficulty in sleeping is something almost everyone in the program has experienced. Yet, talk to anyone who has been clean any length of time and the member will usually single out the ability to get a good night's sleep as one of the greatest rewards of the program. What's happening here? Just how does the program help us to overcome insomnia?

Our many years experience have made clear some important and unusual facts about sleep and insomnia. One of these is that what your feelings are telling you when you think you can't get to sleep--either about how much sleep you are actually getting or about the danger of going without sleep--are lies. In fact, there are two very helpful sayings in the program that illustrate this. One is, "No one ever died of lack of sleep." The other is, "You will get as much sleep as you need and more than you think you do." We can add one more thing: "For the newly recovering addict, not sleeping is pretty normal."

For years we have flooded our nervous systems with downers, uppers and all sorts of mood changers. Our nervous systems are not yet comfortable in a drug free environment; as they adjust to being clean our ability to get a good night's sleep will increase. Sleeplessness is one of those problems for which staying clean alone is usually the answer.

Concerning the second saying, we point out that we are usually poor judges of how much sleep we get. Sometimes we think we have been able to sleep--but then are able to spot specific dreams. One morning a member complained of spending a sleepless night, and his wife played for him a cassette recording of his snoring. "You got enough sleep to

04 keep me awake," she said. Usually our bodies are wiser than our minds, and we do get the
05 sleep we need, not as much as we want, perhaps, but what we need.

06 All this may be little consolation to you at 3:30 in the morning. What, then, can you
07 do when you're actually experiencing insomnia? (For us, insomnia usually consists of the
08 fearful anticipation of not sleeping.)

09 First, don't take a pill. If you have such pills around, it doesn't speak well for your
10 recovery.

11 Second, don't try to sleep. Sleeping is one of the items on that long list of things that
12 the addict cannot change by willpower alone. The more you fight sleeplessness, the bigger
13 it gets. Try to lie still. A lot of frantic muscular activity--jumping around, slugging down
14 quantities of warm milk, playing solitaire--are ways of processing your sleeplessness and
15 attaching danger to it. Try doing a little deep breathing. Try simply to relax, to get a little
16 rest. You may tell yourself you don't want to sleep, only to rest. Relaxation tapes and
17 exercises are commonly available. The newcomer may find these useful.

18 The following two stories are fairly typical of our experiences.

19 Linda M. was in a detox unit for withdrawal from barbiturates. She had been taking
20 them addictively for several years. She was not given sleeping medication, nor did she ask
21 for any. "I knew I was going to have to fight this out sooner or later," she says. "The first
22 night I didn't sleep. The second night I didn't sleep. I didn't sleep the third, nor the fourth,
23 nor the fifth night. The sixth night I slept."

24 Carl C. was a pharmacist with a long history of addiction to medical narcotics. The
25 first week of recovery he called his sponsor at 4 a.m. on one of his most difficult nights of
26 sleeplessness. The sponsor advised him to turn the radio on to a soothing FM station and
27 to lie still and to try to relax but to try not to sleep. Carl took his sponsor's suggestions
28 seriously. He lay down, tried to relax and found himself awakening three hours later. He
29 tried it again and awakened three hours after that.

19. Drugs, doctors, and pain

Physical sickness, being part of life, will inevitably be part of our recovery. In fact, addicts who generally find it important to control events and people may well experience physical sickness as more threatening than non-addicts. Unwelcome as sickness is, particularly serious sickness, we assure you that the addict can stay clean, and even relatively calm, through this or any other ordeal with which life confronts us. It would be a weak program for living which kept us clean during good times but was incapable of offering us help when the going got tough.

First of all let us admit that medications hold special hazards for all addicts, not merely those with a history of abuse of prescription drugs. Occasionally someone in the program will find himself taking the most harmless medications compulsively, twenty or thirty aspirin or Tylenol tablets a day, for instance, or megadoses of vitamins. Is taking so much aspirin that one's stomach bleeds any less destructive than taking a drug which makes one high? Just as importantly, being compulsive about any medication is a sign that we have gone adrift, become distrustful of the healing powers of the Fellowship and our program. When we take pills this way we're saying to ourselves that God won't work. And it's not entirely the content of the pill that creates the problem; it's the content of the head.

Let's talk about pills that are not obviously mood altering, blood pressure medication, for instance, or antibiotics. About such pills, the addict should ask himself two questions:

- 1) If the pill is a prescription medication, do I take it as prescribed?
- 2) Do I make a point of telling my sponsor and others close to me in the program that I am taking the pill?

Concerning the use of a medication for a specific physical complaint, we should always remember that illness served as an ideal tool in our former addictive lifestyle. We used it either to get attention or to get drugs. We were skilled at convincing doctors and even ourselves of the intensity of a headache or the disabling quality of our anxiety attacks.

58 Such ways of using physical sickness will, of course, tend to carry over into our recovery,
59 and we must learn to spot when we are either exaggerating complaints or using them for an
60 ulterior purpose. One sure sign is when fascination with the pill outweighs our concern
61 with the symptom the pill is taken for. Some of us will sheepishly admit that our headaches
62 or muscle spasms were left behind in the dust of our excitement over a new medication as
63 we raced from the doctor's office, script in hand. Whenever the prospect of taking any
64 medication makes our hearts beat faster, we are on treacherous ground. It is especially
65 then that we need the objective guidance and experience of others in the program.

66 Over-the-counter medications present special problems to the addict. Some cold pills
67 and antihistamines are mood altering. Any cough suppressant containing alcohol is
68 dangerous for us, and those containing such compounds as chlorpheniramine can cause us
69 difficulties. Recovering addicts should read labels on non-prescription drugs. Many of us
70 have found that taking something as innocent as sinus medication for nasal congestion has
71 released our mental obsession and physical compulsions for drugs all over again. The drug
72 creates its own space in our lives.

73 The latter point is particularly important since secretiveness is an essential
74 component of addiction. If we are secretive about taking aspirin or antihistamines, it is
75 certain that sooner or later the substance is going to create a problem. On the other hand
76 when we are open with those in the program about any pill we use, compulsive behavior
77 has little to feed or grow on.

78 Many people in the program refuse to take any non-prescribed medication. It is a
79 good idea that, before you take any pill—even vitamins—you discuss it with your sponsor. A
80 certain danger warning is when you look forward to taking the pill, and find yourself
81 thinking a lot about it.

82 Faced with the prospect of taking an unfamiliar drug, you have the right to know what
83 is in it and how it will effect you. You should discuss with your doctor your addiction, what
84 your recovery means to you, and that drugs have been particularly dangerous for you. This

1335 is a good opportunity for you to be assertive about your recovery. Some of us feel more
1336 secure in choosing physicians who treat large numbers of program members. You must
1337 learn to level with your doctor--remember, it's your body, your mind, your spirit.

1388 When should you consult a physician? We do not advocate that you diagnose and
1389 treat your own physical complaints; in other words, neither you nor we should act as
1390 physicians. However, we point out that it is always the patient who decides when a specific
1391 complaint requires a physician's attention. This has always been so. In fact, who else can
1392 make the decision for him? The longer you live with a clean body and the more
1393 information you acquire, the more likely you will be to know when to call the doctor. An
1394 enormous number of complaints--ulcers, headaches, sinus trouble, back pains being often
1395 among them--are sometimes cured simply by staying clean. Some seem to come early in
1396 recovery and then disappear--leg cramps, for instance. Some are remedied by proper diet,
1397 rest and exercise. Others may need a physician's attention.

1398 The knottiest problem of all is the one of addictive pain killers. If you are
1399 experiencing great physical pain, should you allow yourself to take a prescribed narcotic--
1400 codeine, morphine, Percodan, or some similar drug? We admit that on this issue opinions
1401 in the program are somewhat divided, although it is a tribute to the spirit of tolerance and
1402 love that the program fosters that people are generally unwilling to tell anyone else what to
1403 do. After all, it's your pain. Each of us has probably made a private decision--based on as
1404 much information as he has available--about what he would do in such a situation.

1405 It is important that you realize such events are very rare. Fretting about what you
1406 should do in such a situation is a little like worrying about your escape route in an
1407 earthquake. Further, we remind you that the program, the Fellowship and God as you
1408 understand Him will keep you clean under any and all conditions. We repeat our
1409 guarantee that if you stay in fit spiritual condition you will not relapse.

1410

411 20. Telephone therapy

412
413 "You're no longer alone," the newcomer is told. "Use the Fellowship; get telephone
414 numbers." Often we stuffed the slips of paper covered with telephone numbers into our
415 pockets but never used them. What was the reason? The reason was, we didn't know how.

416 That seems like a strange thing to say. Everyone knows how to use the telephone--it's
417 one of our earliest learning experiences. You just pick up the phone, you dial the number,
418 and then Then what?

419 Well, in this case we're asking for help. We're screwed up, maybe feeling suicidal,
420 depressed, craving a drug, suffering an anxiety attack, whatever. And we've been told to
421 telephone someone in the program whenever we get upset. But that's our whole problem:
422 We've never learned how to ask for help. Doing so goes against our entire using image--we
423 were self-sufficient, tough, cool, the masters of the game. Now here we are shaking,
424 frightened, having to ask for help. And maybe even having to ask for help on a daily basis.

425 It is useful here to quote a program paradox. "You have to surrender to win." We
426 think about the people still into their addiction--winners, by their own account--and ask
427 ourselves what their lives are like. They're winning all the way to the emergency wards, the
428 jails, the funeral parlors. Well, we admit, maybe we do need to learn to ask for help.

429 Another thing we have to remember is that we not only ask for help--by the process of
430 asking we give help. We all need to be needed and we have made the other person feel
431 needed. He may have had his own bad day and will welcome the contact. Also what you
432 are doing is what he himself had to do to get and stay clean.

433 How do we open the conversation? There are lots of ways.

434
435 "Hello. I don't know whether you remember me or not. I'm _____, (have no
436 gender) from the Wednesday night meeting," for example.

437

138 Then comes the tricky part--letting the other person know you want help. Some lines
1439 we've found effective are:

1440
1441 "I feel I need to talk to someone."
1442

1443 "I liked what you had to say at the meeting last night."
1444

1445 "I'm sort of screwed up right now."
1446

1447 As we continue to use telephone therapy, we learn how to share our joy, too: a new
1448 job, a raise, a great meeting we attended we want to talk about. Our telephone contacts
1449 become our network of new friends, program friends. Until we build friendships in the
1450 program it will be very difficult for us to let go of our using acquaintances.

1451 We are often told that the recovering addict needs intimate daily contact with another
1452 recovering addict. The telephone is one of the most effective ways of doing this. It's a tool
1453 that's available any time of the day or night. We must learn to use it.
1454

1455 21. Getting active

1456
1457 Newcomers often find themselves in a baffling situation. They have been told to
1458 attend meetings regularly and to chose a sponsor, and perhaps have done so. Yet they may
1459 feel on the outside of Narcotics Anonymous, cursed with the same feelings they had during
1460 their addiction, still alone and isolated, never quite able to discover the secret that allows
1461 them to join the group, to really feel they belong. They may even project their feelings
1462 onto Narcotics Anonymous as a whole, bitterly accusing it of being cliquish, snobbish,
1463 disinterested in the newcomer's welfare.

1464 First, let us assure any newcomer feeling this way that he is partly right. We are at
1465 times cliquish, we are at times snobbish, we are not always sufficiently friendly in
1466 welcoming the newcomer. In short, we are addicts trying, just as you are, to get well. Much
1467 of our behavior, individually or as a group, is imperfect. We all have a lot of changing to
1468 do.

1469 Having admitted that, let's get back to your feelings. What are you going to do? It
1470 may come as a surprise to you to realize that there is a way you can change Narcotics
1471 Anonymous; you can change Narcotics Anonymous, because you are a part of it, by
1472 changing yourself. We won't dwell on the folly of your trying to whip Narcotics Anonymous
1473 into shape without working first on yourself. What do you imagine would be the fate of any
1474 group of ex-addicts all of whom assembled for the sole purpose of changing the others,
1475 never themselves? If the results weren't so fatal, they might even be amusing. There is
1476 only one life you can take charge of and make changes in, and that is your own.

1477 You may feel the program's not treating you justly, but life is not just, and there is no
1478 way we can make it that way. It is our belief that those of us who continually complain
1479 about the injustices of life and about our mistreatment by others, are stalling. It is a way of
1480 avoiding taking charge of our lives.

1481 You must take charge of your program life. There is a simple technique for doing
1482 this: get involved! Members sometimes refer to getting involved as the service part of the
1483 program.

1484 Here are some simple suggestions for getting involved.

1485 #1: Do little things. Clean ashtrays, offer to make coffee, help set the room up. Such
1486 minor chores won't quite live up to our drug-induced fantasies about our noble fate,
1487 but then neither will anything else that is good for us.

1488 #2: You extend your hand to the newcomer. A member of Narcotics Anonymous with a
1489 very healthy marriage was asked how he and his wife managed to do it. "It's easy," he
1490 replied. "We each give in 90 per cent of the time." Being self-centered people, we

191 always imagine we are doing more than our share. We seldom are. If you see a
492 newcomer, go up to him, introduce yourself. He needs to talk to someone who is
3 staying clean, and you are. The worst thing he can do is talk to his fellow newcomers,
4 who are still partly stuck in their games.

495 #3: Go to business meetings. The affairs of Narcotics Anonymous are neither complex
4 6 nor wearying. When you are at a business meeting, voting and otherwise expressing
497 your contribution to our group conscience, you will feel you belong. The newcomer
4 8 has a valid opinion.

1 99 #4: Stay around after meetings. That's when much of the best in the Fellowship expresses
1500 itself. Our isolation is the hardest part of our game to give up. We find ourselves
1 01 saying things like, "We've got to get together sometime," or "Let's go to a movie
1502 sometime," but it never happens. Translate for the word "sometime" the phrase, "At
1 03 least I want to. But I can't, because I'm really afraid of people and what they think of
1 04 me." Sticking around after meetings is a relatively painless way of allowing yourself to
1 05 be drawn into the warmth of the Fellowship. Usually someone is going out for coffee--
1 06 you can ask around. Or you can invite others to go out. Those trivial--but for
1507 newcomers often difficult and painful--coffee outings after the meetings have a big
1508 pay-off. They signify that we are willing to join the human race.

1509 There is one simple phrase which we all should keep in mind: This is it. There is no
1510 future event that will be more important than this one. There is no magic moment in our
1511 psychological futures when everything will begin to click and we will really start living. This
1512 is it. Today, this meeting, the little coffee session or bull session afterwards, is all you have.
1513 Make yourself part of it. Unless we make ourselves ready for the present this way, we will
1514 never be ready for the future.

1515 After you have been in the program a little while, there are some other things you can
1516 do.

1517 #5: Speak when you are asked to. That means, be the featured speaker at a speaker-
1518 discussion meeting. Do you have enough time? A good way of telling is: If the
1519 person who asked you believes you do, you do. You may find giving your first talk is a
1520 scary affair, but it is a certain way to grow. Wanting to back out once you've agreed
1521 to talk is very average, and being totally pre-occupied with what you're going to say to
1522 the extent of getting no sleep the night before is common. It's a good idea to
1523 approach giving your first talk this way: Don't think of yourself as having to manage
1524 everything you say. Let God give your talk: Let your experiences and your words be
1525 the vehicle for His message. If you look at it that way, then it's obvious that nothing
1526 you can say will be wrong. You do not have to be "well" for anybody.

1527 No matter how you psych yourself up, you may find yourself sweating and nervous.

1528 Fine. Your audience will love you for it.

1529 #6: Take commitments. This means speaking at rehabs, prisons, hospitals, and
1530 institutional Narcotics Anonymous groups. The good effect on our recovery is
1531 electrifying. We are vividly reminded of where we came from, and where we're
1532 headed if we use again. We see very sick people still into their addiction giving the
1533 same crazy excuses for their behavior we once gave. "My God!" we think, "I once
1534 said that!"

1535 #7: Do Twelfth Step work. "You've got to give it away to keep it." You do not have to be
1536 clean long to go on a Twelfth Step call, which means carrying the message to the still-
1537 suffering addict as someone carried the message to you (See the section, "Getting into
1538 the Steps"). You should, of course, always have a more experienced member with
1539 you. Twelfth Step contacts are often made via a Narcotics Anonymous phonenumber.
1540 Various members of the groups volunteer to take phonenumber calls for a fixed period of
1541 time. Tell your Group Service Representative you want to get involved in this kind of
1542 work.

1543 Having so little clean time, you may wonder what you have to offer a new person.
1544 What you have to offer is hope. Often still suffering addicts cannot identify with a member
1545 who has been clean five years: It seems like an impossible accomplishment. They can,
1546 however, identify with someone who's been clean six months.

1547 You do not need to be wise or to have answers on a Twelfth Step call. Remember
1548 the preamble: "We share our experience, strength and hope." It says nothing about sharing
1549 our wisdom.

1550 It is a good general policy to remember that men Twelfth Step men, women Twelfth
1551 Step women.

1552 The above suggestions are some of the ways you can get involved. They're all ways of
1553 committing yourself to a clean life. The group won't run after you. You must run toward
1554 it.

1555
1556 22. Loneliness

1557
1558 It has often been said that drug addiction is a lonely disease. As we continue to use,
1559 more and more isolation and loneliness seep into our lives. This is one of the results of the
1560 progression of our addiction. When we began using drugs, it was usually for social
1561 purposes; we wanted to enjoy being with people, to be less uninhibited and insecure, more
1562 spontaneous. Many of us imagined that using drugs made us feel the way normal people
1563 felt all the time. We could joke, sing, dance, have a good time. What a marvelous
1564 medicine for our shyness and isolation. Eventually we found we were using drugs more and
1565 yet enjoying being around people less. Toward the end of our using we found ourselves
1566 secretive, paranoid, less and less able to stand the pressure of being with others. Our
1567 addiction had built a glass wall between us and the rest of the human race. One member,
1568 whose drug of choice was uppers, tells the following story:

1569 "I knew I was pulling away from everyone else. It really bothered me that others
1570 could go out and socialize and have a good time and I couldn't. I sweet-talked a retired
1571 doctor out of a prescription for drugs. These would help me be sociable, I thought. I
1572 would take them and for a while I managed to get myself to go to a few parties and chatter
1573 endlessly with the people there. But all that talk didn't help me to feel any more
1574 comfortable with people--it made things worse. Eventually I quit going out to social events;
1575 I would just go into bars and talk to strangers or go home and take electrical appliances
1576 apart and put them back together. One night, for no reason, I took the dashboard out of
1577 my new car. I spent eight hours on it but I could never get it back in. I realized then that
1578 the drug had caused me to totally desert people."

1579 Another member, whose drug of choice was alcohol, has the following story. "Did you
1580 ever have the feeling that you wanted to go some place and do something, but didn't know
1581 what it was? That was the story of my drinking. I would go into one bar after another,
1582 looking for the party. I would go to ten or twenty different bars, looking for it. 'Maybe
1583 another city is where it's really happening,' I would tell myself. 'Sometime I'm going to San
1584 Francisco or Mexico City.' But, of course, I would just give up and go home. The party
1585 wasn't there either, just an empty, spooky looking apartment."

1586 We have all had the experience of being lonely in a crowd. If only there were
1587 someone who understood us, who loved us! It may come as a surprise to us that having
1588 someone who understands and loves us is no cure for loneliness, either. In fact, it can
1589 make the pain of loneliness worse.

1590 A young man clean six months in the program tells the following story.

1591 "After supper I sit at home with my wife and my little girl. We have a really good
1592 marriage. I love her, and I love my little girl. But as I sit there talking to them or looking
1593 at them, I realize I feel totally and completely alone. And I had told myself that having
1594 these people to love would take my loneliness away."

595 Yes, often we're lonely in a crowd and we're certainly lonely alone. The idea of
596 spending time by ourselves throws us into a panic. We may try to make sure that every
597 hour of our day is socially accounted for--that we are by ourselves as little as possible.

598 What a dilemma! And what's the solution? Because we were lonely in our addiction,
599 does it mean we will inevitably be lonely in our recovery?

1600 It may help us to recognize at this point that many people besides addicts get lonely.
1601 It's just that we specialized in it. The guilt about our using, our desire to control events and
1602 people, our feelings of being unique and unloveable, all these magnified an already existing
1603 loneliness. Not being able to be with themselves, not being able to be with others are
1604 problems all humans have to come to terms with. Although we recovering addicts may
1605 have to work extra hard on our loneliness, we are joined in the struggle by the rest of the
1606 human race.

1607 One member of the program was handing out buttons at a meeting on which was
1608 depicted a sad-eyed dog and the caption "I'm lonely." When he handed one to a newcomer,
1609 the newcomer said, a little defensively, "Why did you give this button to me?" The member
1610 replied, "It's a good bet. Everyone's lonely."

1611 Most of us in Narcotics Anonymous, because of stories like the ones told in the
1612 beginning of this chapter, have come to realize that loneliness is not a social problem or
1613 even a psychological problem. While it is certain that coming to terms with it has to be an
1614 inside job, we believe that loneliness is a spiritual condition.

1615 To the newcomer, this may be a very surprising statement. However, our experience
1616 has borne it out. We have discovered that systematically applying to our lives the spiritual
1617 principles of the Narcotics Anonymous program, particularly the Third and Eleventh Steps
1618 (See the section, "Getting into the steps"), is the most effective way to overcome loneliness.
1619 In this way the walls around us that we have built up through our addiction can be broken
1620 down and, as one often hears it put at meetings, "We rejoin the human race".

1621 Although being around people isn't a cure as such for loneliness, it's pretty clear that
1622 God can't be discovered in a vacuum. We find Him through people. This brings us to the
1623 first suggestion for combatting loneliness:

1624 #1: Commit yourself to being around program people. Loneliness tends to breed on
1625 itself. If we haven't made plans to be around others in advance, we find we don't have
1626 the energy to seek out people when we are lonely. It's a good idea to carry around a
1627 little engagement calendar. It's useful to make a date to have supper with a program
1628 person before you go to a meeting. It takes up the slack between getting out of work
1629 and meeting time. Most newcomers find themselves sliding into self-pity when they
1630 eat alone. How do you approach someone to make a dinner date? Simple. Call the
1631 person up and read this to him or her. "This is -- --from the -- -- night meeting. I
1632 wondered whether you might like to have supper and then go to the meeting tonight."
1633 We assume you have lots of telephone numbers.

1634 #2: Try to remember the last time you were lonely when you spoke at a meeting, went on
1635 a Twelfth Step call, or took an institutional meeting with a bunch of Narcotics
1636 Anonymous members.

1637 #3: Talk about your loneliness at a meeting. People who confess their loneliness to each
1638 other often find themselves not lonely.

1639 #4: Don't expect to find a cure for loneliness in casual or compulsive sex. Many, many of
1640 us try it, of course. But we always end up feeling cheated and more lonely than
1641 before. Why? Because when we express our sexuality this way, we are denying to
1642 ourselves that the other person is a real human being. Our partner becomes just a
1643 collection of physical traits that we use to get off on sexually. The word "get off" was
1644 chosen carefully; sex used this way is a game very close to the using game (See the
1645 section, "Sex and relationships"). We don't take a moral stand against casual sex. We
1646 just advise you not to expect too much from it; in particular, not to expect it to furnish
1647 a solution to your human problems.

1648 #5: If you're beginning to have persistent problems with loneliness, it's a sign you should
1649 be getting into the spiritual part of the program, which is the Twelve Steps of
1650 Narcotics Anonymous.

1651 #6: Use your sponsor. Your sponsor can provide valuable guidance for dealing with
1652 loneliness.

1653 The Narcotics Anonymous program works to rid us of loneliness if we work it. We
1654 find that we can come to enjoy a richness and intensity of human companionship we've
1655 never experienced before, and can even enjoy being alone--something we never before
1656 believed possible. We become our own best friend, a source of love, self-esteem, and
1657 comfort. When we go from being our own enemy to being our own friend, it means we're
1658 finally growing up.

1659 "I just wanted to get away from everyone and all the confusion of the city, so I went
1660 fishing by myself yesterday. I really enjoyed it." This, such a typical statement made at a
1661 meeting, proves we can come to terms with ourselves. It is one of the great rewards of the
1662 program.

1663
1664 23. Dry highs and using dreams (Addict Behavior and ways in which our disease gets
1665 active in recovery)

1666
1667 Note to all WLC members: We need to change the words "dry high". Bring
1668 suggestions and rewrite of this section to Detroit

1669 A dry high may be defined as a period of emotional instability lasting from one day to
1670 six or so weeks. Although a dry high takes place when we are clean in the program--hence
1671 the word "dry"--the emotions we experience on the binge recall those we underwent while
1672 using. Some of the symptoms are anger, being at odds with everyone, including ourselves,
1673 acute feelings of impatience and rebelliousness, more than our usual quota of resentments
1674 and self-pity, and occasionally, the desire to use or to get back into our game. Our anger

1675 may even be directed at people in the program because of their inability to give us what we
1676 feel we need.

1677 Addicts have always had problems with authority--we have always hated it and feared
1678 it. While practicing the Narcotics Anonymous program will help us come to terms with this
1679 part of our personalities, we may find that during a dry high we backslide considerably. We
1680 may mouth off at a boss, drive recklessly, almost daring a policeman to stop us, or break
1681 furniture or dishes. One member slammed an expensive FM radio to smithereens against a
1682 wall because he objected to a disk jockey's analysis of a popular record.

1683 If it seems to you that such behavior is both childish and self-indulgent, you are right.
1684 A dry high is really a prolonged temper tantrum--a reversion to the child state with all its
1685 demands on the rest of the human race. Unfortunately, the rest of the human race goes on,
1686 ignoring our tantrum or politely but firmly closing the door on us.

1687 A dry high need not pose a threat to our recovery. It depends on how quickly we
1688 decide to deal with it. Once we spot our behavior for what it is, a tantrum, rather than
1689 rationalizing it the way we used to rationalize all of our destructive behavior, the dry high is
1690 near its end.

1691 A sure cure for a dry high is gratitude. How can we persist in our childish demands
1692 on life if we are made aware of the awful hell we have just come from? Of course, that part
1693 of us that doesn't want to get well, the same part that wants to prolong our bad moods and
1694 play them for maximum dramatic effect, doesn't want to feel grateful. We would rather be
1695 right than be well.

1696 If we have been active in the program, we are pretty well insulated from the worst
1697 consequences of a dry high. Soon someone newer than we will be placed in our path,
1698 someone still confused and really suffering, who needs our help.

1699 Dreams of using are something almost all of us have experienced. The dreams take
1700 many forms. One common one is where the dreamer uses just a small amount of a drug,
1701 and then spends the rest of the dream worrying about the effect on his recovery, whether he

will lose control, or how he can hide his using or explain his using to members in the program. Program members remark on the intensity and realistic quality of the dreams. We may awake bathed in sweat, confused and panicky. It may take us several minutes to realize it was only a dream. One member recalls searching his apartment frantically for a syringe after a using dream.

The newcomer maybe surprised and relieved to know that we in Narcotics Anonymous think using dreams can be healthy sign. We have consciously accepted the fact that we are powerless over drugs. It is likely that using dreams reflect the attempt of our subconscious to come to terms with our conscious decision. It is a way a of working the First Step. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to talk about such dreams at a meeting, if only for the reason that they are upsetting. In fact, you have probably heard others discuss them. While the dreams seem to become rarer and less intense, even members with ten or more years of solid recovery time occasionally have them. Like most of the other experiences you will have in staying clean, they are normal.

24. Sex and relationships

"Don't take a drug, don't get involved," is some advice the newcomer is likely to hear. He can understand the first part of the advice--after all the devastation of drug use is what brought him to Narcotics Anonymous in the first place. But what's this about not getting involved? Involved in or with what?

We can understand the newcomer's confusion and dismay. We have, all of our lives, been given a hard sell on the idea of romance. Turn on a TV set and sooner or later you will see a boy and girl sauntering on a beach in a sunset, windblown hair, holding hands, smiling adoringly at each other. Multiply this brief sequence by a million or so and you will get the number of times we have each been exposed to the same message: Romantic love is what life is all about. The goal of every normal person is to discover that one special

1729 someone who is going to give meaning to life and then settle down with that person in
1730 never ending bliss.

1731 In the addict, who has always sought for something outside himself to solve his
1732 problems, the product of romantic love has an eager consumer. The message is clear: Life
1733 with romance is everything; life without romance is no life at all, something bleak, merely
1734 to be waited out, until romance comes along.

1735 Perhaps the search for romance can work as a priority for some people, although no
1736 group of people can make more of a mess of their lives than addicts by running after
1737 romance. We don't say this because Narcotics Anonymous is against love; we do believe
1738 that love has to be a foundation for life. But there is a big difference between love and
1739 romantic love. Often they have little to do with each other.

1740 To clarify what we are really looking for in romance, let's examine our state of mind
1741 when we came into Narcotics Anonymous. We are adrift in confusion, our moods roller-
1742 coasting between depression and euphoria. It's understandable why: We recovering
1743 addicts are on the beginning of the most profound change we will ever make in our lives.
1744 After several months of recovery, we often feel like screaming, "Please! No more changes!
1745 Just let me tread water for a little while." At such times it's explained to us that no one in
1746 the Narcotics Anonymous program can tread water. We are condemned to either go
1747 forward or we drift backward. We are, truly, the slaves of change (See the section, "Making
1748 changes"). We long for something to give us calmness, some big hand to steady the ship.
1749 We long for the solidity and assurance of romance.

1750 In fact, we have always looked for something outside of ourselves to make us well,
1751 some kind of magic. Either it was the right therapist, generally some kind of a kindly father
1752 figure who would place his hands on our shoulders and pronounce the word, "Heal!," or
1753 some religion, or the right drug, or the right boy or girl. What we have to learn and to
1754 accept when we come into Narcotics Anonymous is that There is no magic. There are no
1755 soft, easy ways to recovery. Staying clean always involves a lot of work.

As you may have guessed by now, looking for romance is just our old pursuit of magic. It is a softer, easier way of staying clean that, in the end, turns out not to be softer or easier at all. We always find that romantic involvements have their own kind of torture for us, and that the pain caused by a messy love affair exceeds the pain of whatever we were using the affair to avoid--mainly, growing up.

The newly recovered addict is rarely mature enough to manage an emotional involvement. Those early years in life when most normal people are learning to deal with their emotions we have spent using. For us, there was never a need to grow up. Gaining maturity, that ultimate defense against life's misfortunes, always took a back seat to getting high.

When we recovering addicts take a hard look at what we are like--as we must in our Fourth Step inventory--we are genuinely surprised to find how much of our behavior is affected by our immaturity. We discover, for instance, that we have always had an all or nothing attitude about life, with little appreciation of moderation, the "golden mean." We have tended to idealize people and events, rather than accepting them as they are. Our total self-involvement led us to believe that others exist solely to fulfill our wants. We have a low frustration tolerance. Our self-concept has alternated between feelings of power and self-hatred, and, in fact, we have a very limited idea of what we are really like. Our immaturity is so noticeable to the people around us that one doctor who specialized in treating addicts labeled the addict, "his majesty, the infant." Since we are trying to stay clean and are trying to feel better about ourselves, that label hurts. But there is simply too much truth in the doctor's observation for us to ignore it.

We do get better, of course; one of the main goals of the Narcotics Anonymous program is to rescue us from our perpetual state of childishness. But growth, though inevitable if we work the program, is slow. The sad fact is that a healthy relationship requires of us qualities we have in very limited supply when we are new in the program.

782 Even non-addicts tell us that loving is usually the most difficult thing they've ever had to
783 learn to do.

784 What qualities must we be able to bring to a relationship? First of all, we need to
785 know how to be a friend. Most of us who are new in the program have little idea of how to
786 socialize or how to be a friend. We are often uptight and preoccupied around people and
787 have little feeling for how to handle another person's moods, particularly another person's
788 silence. One member, who was recovering from a very painful involvement, received the
789 following suggestion: "Why don't you quit trying to fall in love, at least for a little while,
790 and begin learning how to make friends?" This seemed to hit the nail on the head, the
791 member later admitted. Friendship requires tolerance, trust, forgiveness, acceptance of the
792 good along with the bad, and the ability not to put conditions on the other person. Can any
793 of us honestly say that we had such qualities when we came into the program? Like all
794 other living skills, these things have to be learned. Which of us, coming out of a game
795 which required us to defend our stash and always keep ourselves covered, can claim the
796 ability to trust others, for example?

1797 Secondly, a relationship requires of us an ability to give that we've never learned. We
1798 are by nature takers, not givers. Someone once said that love is allowing, not demanding;
1799 giving, not taking. In fact, allowing and giving are twin personally traits. Allowing someone
1800 to be whoever they are in any and all situations is giving that person his or her freedom. It
1801 is our nature to put demands on the other person, to lay down rules for behavior. Our
1802 insecurity about who we are and our deep-seated fear that we will lose the other person
1803 make us possessive, demanding, jealous. We have seen many of our members who were
1804 fully aware that their possessiveness and continual childish demands were destroying a
1805 relationship but who were unable to act otherwise. This is always the plight of newcomers
1806 in relationships: They may see what they are doing wrong, but are powerless to do anything
1807 else. The truth is that our possessiveness and jealousy don't result from lack of insight into
1808 our behavior. They come about because of our immaturity. When we grow up, we will no

longer be jealous people, but that is hardly a help to us in our first year or so of staying clean. In the meantime, we usually find we simply cannot allow the other person in the relationship to be who he or she is. We feel we have too much to lose.

When such character defects come into play in a relationship, it often signifies the beginning of the end. The partner feels suffocated by our nagging and deprived of the opportunity for personal growth. Eventually, the other person wants out.

Of course, its a disappointment to us to realize that we can't have something we want so much. "How," we ask ourselves, "can something that makes us feel so good be bad for us?" We might have said the same thing about drugs. And the similarity goes further; it's not just that we can't handle the interpersonal mechanics of a relationship. The feelings that romance give us are dangerously close to those of being high: the same sense of elation, even rapture, the constant obsession--in one case with drugs, in the other with our romantic object. Music sounds more beautiful, the world looks more exciting.

It's obvious that love used in this way is an addiction. The danger these feelings pose to our recovery is great. We have seen many of our members, unable to deal with a destructive romance, resume using in a desperate last-ditch effort to bring their feelings under control. Or they may use in an effort to punish the other person or to punish themselves. Too often the game of romance is the game of life or death.

Not surprisingly, when romance moves into the recovering addict's life, the program is forced out. We find ourselves going to fewer meetings, and those meetings we do begrudgingly go to we spend in thinking obsessively about our lover. The tools of the program are put aside, God is placed on permanent retirement. We may find ourselves slightly distrustful of God--He may not, after all, give us what we so badly want. Besides, why do we need the program when we have the one person who is going to make our lives right? If we allow our commitment to the program to be undermined this way, we will not be able to stay clean.

335 For the women in the program, emotional involvement can pose special dangers.
336 This has to do with the way society educates us. Women are taught to believe they are
337 incomplete unless they have a man. Men are, from early childhood, more likely to be made
338 aware of the fact that they have many options in life; women are usually given the message
339 that they have only one--being a mate. A woman coming into the program often feels her
340 helplessness even more acutely than a man. The temptation is all the greater for her to
341 seek out an emotional involvement. Narcotics Anonymous realizes that it can't change this
342 unfair self-concept society teaches women but we can help our women members to
343 recognize it and overcome it.

344 The Narcotics Anonymous program makes it possible for women to enjoy what is for
345 many an unfamiliar experience: The friendship of other women. Often at a meeting one
346 hears a woman talk in gratitude about such a friendship. Women in the program come to
347 realize that other women can offer them a unique kind of closeness and emotional support,
348 since women often are less into their heads than men and more in touch with their feelings.
349 The growing self-love that the program gives all of us is what opens them up to such
350 friendships.

351 Those of us who seek unhealthy romantic involvements are still stuck in their game.
352 The Narcotics Anonymous program demands that we learn self-respect and self-love.
353 Obviously, self-respect can never be ours if we allow ourselves to be trapped in an abusive
354 relationship whose whole message is that we are worthless.

355 For such people, we have a word of hope. You can change yourself. You can change
356 the object of your sexual and love interest. As you continue to stay clean and apply the
357 principles of Narcotics Anonymous to your life--particularly the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and
358 Seventh Steps--your self-regard will grow; you will become a better friend to yourself and
359 will be less compelled to seek out people who are punishing. By developing inner strength
360 and self-reliance, you will find it less important to try to get these qualities from someone
361 else. If you are patient, the program will change your view of others. You will be

interested in meeting and getting to know people who can give, not those who can only take.

Of course, men in the program must make changes in their emotional natures, too. Men need to learn to be sensitive and to develop good, honest communication with others. They need to learn that it is all right for them to feel.

We have indicated how we all encounter difficulties in forming and sustaining friendships. In the program all of us, male and female, whatever our age, come to recognize our own special worth and the worth of all others. We learn to stop evaluating each other in terms of physical traits such as age.

Absolutely the worst romantic involvement a newcomer can fall into is one where the partner is a newcomer, too. Two sickies don't make a well relationship. Such relationships usually run a brief and disastrous course. About the only thing two newcomers can share are their games. Such a relationship tends to isolate both partners from those in the program with wisdom and experience, and the loss of this life-giving contact often spells the end of recovery. Also, the relationship undermines any kind of reasonable meeting schedule. If the partners attend the same meetings they are usually obsessed in the contemplation of each other, or each is trying to say something especially wise for the other's benefit. On the other hand, attending meetings where the partner is absent may not allow the member to keep a healthy meeting schedule because of the limited number of meetings in the area. There are exceptions, of course. And we all know of solid relationships which began under the most adverse conditions. But we have seen many, many more program members get high from entering a relationship too soon, particularly, a relationship with another newcomer. It is like playing Russian roulette with five chambers loaded.

It may take considerably more than one year of recovery for us to be able to build a healthy relationship. We must get to know ourselves before we can offer anything to anyone else. A member entering a relationship should stay in very close contact with the

89 sponsor and the program. We have seen even program members with strong programs
90 derailed by unfortunate relationships. One of our most difficult tasks is to unlearn all the
91 unrealistic expectations concerning love that society has saturated us with. We have to
92 accept the fact that there will be times when we are pretty much out of touch with our love
93 for our partner. There will inevitably be arguments and sometimes long-standing clashes of
94 temperament. Almost any two people living together find they have to disagree about
95 certain things, and there are always certain topics which must by mutual consent be placed
96 off-limits. To continually bring up a subject which embarrasses or pains the partner is not
97 honesty, it is aggressiveness.

98 We all want the good qualities a loving relationship can bring into our lives, but
99 fighting through the bad that exists in any relationship can call for every ounce of our new-
00 found maturity. Most program members who are involved in a successful relationship have
01 learned it is more work than anything else. Above all, we can't expect any romantic
02 feelings to last very long or to offer the relationship much stability or direction when they
03 are present. All in all, we have to give a firm NO to society's attempt to sell us the
04 commodity of romantic love.

05 One program member, clean now six years, survived several nearly disastrous
06 romantic involvements in his recovery and eventually met a woman, not a program
07 member, whom he began dating on a casual basis, almost as a friend. The friendship
08 deepened into love--not romantic love--and two years later they decided to marry. The
09 relationship shows every sign of being a healthy one. Looking back on his earlier
10 experiences, the member says with relief, "Thank God, I didn't have to fall in love for it to
11 happen."

12 If the newcomers aren't to become romantically involved, how are they to take care of
13 their sexual needs? Is the program against sex, too? We have already explained that the
14 program is not against love. Neither is it against sex. We in Narcotics Anonymous are
15 realists. In choosing a workable approach to the sex vs. no sex dilemma, the newcomer

1916 should once again strive for moderation. The pursuit of sex for the sake of sex can create
1917 difficulties for us. We have seen many newcomers get high because they stumbled into
1918 disastrous romances. After all, it is going to take us the rest of our lives to master the
1919 constructive use of our sexual energies. We do not delude ourselves that many virgins find
1920 their way into Narcotics Anonymous. After all, sex was one of the most dynamic
1921 components of our game.

1922 We often use sex, particularly masturbation, as a way of controlling our violently
1923 changing moods or as a solution to other problems.. However, as someone once said,
1924 "ninety percent of the population masturbates and the other ten percent lie about it." We
1925 are more concerned with compulsive sexual behavior, behavior which consumes hours out
1926 of the day and becomes a new game for us. Sex itself becomes an addiction (See the
1927 section, "Other addictions: work, gambling, compulsive sex").

1928 Since we all tend to carry around so much guilt about our past sexual behavior, let's
1929 discuss for a moment what some of our typical experiences have been. Most of us have
1930 used sex extensively in several ways: as a power tool, as an adjunct to getting high, as a
1931 means of obtaining drugs or money, as a way of controlling our emotions.

1932 Addicts, particularly those into street drugs, often undergo a series of brief
1933 homosexual liaisons while in their addiction, even though they may not be homosexual.
1934 The addict may be looking for excitement, or a stabilizing father figure, or attention, or just
1935 plain affection. Our unwillingness to face up to the fact that we enjoyed these experiences
1936 often causes us to come into the program with an unnecessary burden of guilt. Are we gay?
1937 Many of us wonder. Some of us are, of course, but more often than not these homosexual
1938 contacts of the past don't mean very much. The point is that whatever our sexual identity
1939 is, the program will offer us a way of dealing with it. You no longer have to be afraid of
1940 who you are. If you are homosexual, you should be aware that Narcotics Anonymous has
1941 many homosexual members with long and successful recovery.

942 Some of us used sex as a commodity, sometimes as a way of controlling others in our
943 lives, sometimes in return for drugs, stability, or protection.

944 Handling sex responsibly is an important goal of our recovery. The sharing of your
945 experiences with other program members or, when it is appropriate, in closed meetings will
946 prove to be a vital tool in helping you to function in healthy ways sexually as well as to
947 come to terms with your sexual guilt. We often think our sexual experience makes us
948 unique, but it's usually not the case. The chances of your having a sexual event in your past
949 not shared by other recovering addicts is very small. As we grow in the program we come
950 to look upon our past sexual misbehavior with good-natured humor, rather than grim
951 embarrassment and shame. As badly as it sometimes served us, it was often the only way
952 we knew to reach out for the love and the meaning we so desperately wanted out of life.

953 After all these dire warnings, we want to end this chapter on a note of optimism. We
954 assure you that yes, you can find love through the Narcotics Anonymous program. Yes, you
955 can (perhaps for the first time) experience deep and meaningful friendships. The tools of
956 the program will prepare us to be loved and loving people, if we use them diligently and
957 patiently. Love is what life is all about. By staying clean in the Narcotics Anonymous
958 program, we can bring it into our lives.

959
960 25. HOW
961

962 Anyone who wants a capsule summary of those attitudes which will work to assure
963 our success in the program of Narcotics Anonymous should remember the letters of the
964 word HOW—"H" for honesty, "O" for open-mindedness, "W" for willingness.

965 Honesty is not a static quality—instead it is dynamic, a growing quality of our
966 recovery. Behavior we can live with today we may not be able to tolerate in ourselves
967 tomorrow. As we come to think more of ourselves, our standards, values, and principles
968 increase. We can no longer afford to ignore our own behavior. When we view our own

1959 behavior as though it does not belong to us, or as if it were unimportant, we are not
1970 thinking clean. Viewing our actions this way means we still have a lot of denial and self-
1971 deception left in us. We do not think we are worthwhile enough to clean up our act.

1972 Self-respect is the real issue involved here. One of our major problems as addicts is
1973 our isolation from others. Dishonesty serves to maintain our isolation because it is a way of
1974 getting over on others, a way of living a secret life. We in Narcotics Anonymous need
1975 people, and deliberate and systematic dishonesty separates us from them.

1976 As we have said, we grow in our ability to be honest. One sometimes hears at a
1977 meeting a confession of stealing. True, the speaker may still be stealing but, nevertheless,
1978 has given up the option of keeping the stealing a secret. When this happens, it is a major
1979 victory. Behavior we do not like in ourselves is, when we own up to it, on its way to being
1980 past behavior. Talking about our dishonesty at meetings is a commitment to deal with it on
1981 the program's terms.

1982 Dishonesty, particularly stealing, is often very difficult to give up. We used it for so
1983 many purposes. Sometimes we stole to punish people. Thus it served as a substitute for
1984 being assertive, for dealing in a straight-forward manner with our feelings about someone
1985 else. Our boss didn't pay us enough, so we stole. Someone had a nicer car, so we stole the
1986 hubcaps. Stealing was a power trip. In fact, fantasies and day dreams about power
1987 constituted a major part of our mental life. But if we wish to stay clean, we cannot afford
1988 to have any kind of power over other people.

1989 We may work at a job where our employer insists on a certain amount of dishonesty.
1990 We may be salespeople asked to misrepresent a service or product, for example. As we
1991 grow we find ourselves angrily resenting the fact that we are asked to do such a thing. We
1992 are then plagued with the twin demons of resentment and dishonesty. If you are in such a
1993 situation, talk at meetings and talk to your sponsor. You will get the courage you need to
1994 make the decision you must make.

995 Let's talk about open-mindedness. For us it's not an easy trait to come by. We have
996 developed the habit of being cynical, always putting everything down. It was a way of
997 protecting ourselves, and also a cheap way of getting attention. Whatever happened, we
998 could proudly say NO to it.

999 In staying clean, we have to learn to say YES to other people's ideas and opinions, to
000 replace negativity with positivity. Of course, it's hard --negativity was a life-long habit. It's
001 often said that the Narcotics Anonymous program is like a cafeteria line--you take what
002 you want, and reject what you don't. But unless you take something, you'll find yourself
003 getting thinner and thinner. Keep an open mind, in other words, but don't let everything
004 blow through it. If you find someone talking at a meeting who annoys you, ask yourself,
005 "How can I use what this person is saying for my own benefit?" When we find that we can
006 learn from those we dislike, it is a certain sign we are growing. Remember that others, and
007 you, too, have the right to be wrong.

008 At first we hear many things that make no sense to us. Things such as, "You have to
009 surrender to win," for instance. Some of us may be totally turned off--angry and frightened--
010 by the spiritual part of the program. Just when we thought this program was going to save
011 our ass, they hit us with God! Another religious trip! It is particularly in this area that
012 open-mindedness pays off. The God we speak of has very little to do with all the bad
013 associations that word may hold for you. Be open-minded enough to reserve judgement
014 until you find out what we are talking about.

015 We may not want to hear that we have to quit stealing, that we can't go back to
016 school, that we can't have a romantic involvement. But as you hear this unwelcome advice,
017 remember that those who give it have had an enormous amount of hard, practical
018 experience, and have seen people die who wouldn't listen. Try to be open-minded to the
019 fact that what is being suggested can work for you.

020 Finally, let's look at willingness. Most of us were distinctly unwilling when we came
021 into Narcotics Anonymous. We were all pretty much of two minds about our recovery.

2 There's a saying that no one comes into Narcotics Anonymous of his or her own free will.
3 We are all forced in, either by a condition of employment or by family pressure or a court
4 stipulation or the force of circumstances. In a certain sense, none of us wants to be here
5 and our behavior usually reflects our ambivalence about our recovery. We may
6 intentionally distract ourselves at meetings or descend to sulking and silent scorn in social
7 situations. The willingness to recover does not always come easy.

8 However, as more of the rewards of being clean accumulate, we find our enthusiasm
9 about recovery increasing. We begin to really like the people we meet in Narcotics
10 Anonymous, and to hear speakers with whom we deeply identify. Talking to others about
11 important things in our lives is a new and exciting experience. We discover life can actually
12 be good, better than we had ever imagined. We find ourselves laughing, enjoying being
13 with people, awakening each day with more enthusiasm and energy. If we give it a chance,
14 being clean will sell itself. As they say, bring the body around and the mind will follow.
15 The willingness to stay clean comes with staying clean.

16 26. Anger and resentments

17 Anger plays a central role in the life of every addict. Unless we make every attempt
18 to deal constructively with our anger, we stand a chance of using again. People in the
19 Narcotics Anonymous program who have slipped often admit that it was a bout of intense
20 anger, or an ongoing resentment, which led them to use again.

21 The emotion of anger was an intimate part of our using game. Often we got high so
22 that we could act out an already existing anger ("I'll get even with him!") or, paradoxically,
23 we got high to control an anger that seemed to be consuming us. One form our anger took
24 was to use at people ("I'll show them! I'll get high!"). It was a way we expressed our
25 rebellion at parents and all other authority figures.

8 Anger we experience in early recovery will trigger these same reactions, and we will
9 find ourselves tempted once again to use to get even at someone or to control our resulting
0 thoughts or feelings.

1 Of course, anger is a natural emotion—one, perhaps, which is responsible for our
2 survival as a species. All humans experience it in one or more of its many forms, and we
3 can't simply wish it away. However, for the addict, anger has a special significance: We
4 more than anyone else, were the victims of our own anger. When we used at someone, who
5 got hurt?

6 Those of us who used drugs to control our anger are genuinely surprised and
7 frightened at the rage which surfaces in us when we quit using. We have often heard a
8 newcomer say, in all innocence and sincerity, "I really don't hate anyone," and several
9 weeks later, heard him venting his fury against a boss or family member at a meeting. If we
10 don't feel anger, it is a sure sign we are covering it up by expressing it in some other way.
11 Fear and depression are two very common masks for anger.

12 Anger takes many forms: rage, resentment (which can be defined as anger on the
13 installment plan), sarcasm, envy, jealousy, cynicism, suspicion, rigidity. When we
14 experience these emotions, we should be aware that we are skating on thin ice. Even when
15 these feelings aren't specifically connected in our minds with drugs, we have an obligation
16 to use the techniques of the program to deal with them. It is very common for program
17 members to delude themselves into thinking that as long as the anger doesn't specifically
18 cause them to crave drugs, they are in no danger. This is no more than the old "All I have
19 to do is stay clean" fallacy (See the section, "Changes"). We have all seen those who
20 seemed to be doing everything wrong in their recovery—including indulging in self-pity,
21 resentments, and holy wars—and who didn't crave a drug up to the moment they found
22 needles in their arms or pills in their mouths.

23 What about justifiable anger? What about all the crooked politicians, the thugs who
24 mug old ladies, the hypocritical religionists? What about the obvious wrongs all around us?

2075 Shouldn't we properly express anger at these things? Such justifiable anger is a very tricky
2076 subject for the recovering addict. We have never been very careful about distinguishing
2077 between this kind of anger and unjustifiable anger. As we saw it, our anger was always
2078 justified. Did any of us ever say, "Yes, I'm feeling pretty mad right now. But I really have
2079 no reason to. It's actually my fault." Of course not! We always rationalized our anger, and
2080 will continue to do so in our recovery. Not only can we usually not make the distinction
2081 between justifiable and unjustifiable anger, but even if we could, it is very unlikely that we
2082 could then act on the anger in a way that would be healthy for us.

2083 Becoming involved in causes or holy wars has been the downfall of many recovering
2084 addicts. The motives of these addicts were usually pure and the targets of their causes were
2085 often well-chosen: a cruel and unfair employer, a scheming ex-wife, a larcenous lawyer, an
2086 insensitive government bureaucracy. The purity of their motives and the justice of their
2087 cause did not keep these addicts from getting high for the simple reason that for the addict,
2088 anger is part of the using game. When we indulge in it, even for the very best reasons, we
2089 are setting ourselves up because we are getting back into our game. As difficult as it is to
2090 learn to do, we must leave justifiable anger to those who are better qualified to handle it.

2091 How do we handle anger?

2092 Let's talk first about impulsive anger, anger we experience on the spur of the moment.
2093 It is a mistake at such moments to tell ourselves that we shouldn't be angry or that the
2094 anger is unreasonable or bad for us. Giving ourselves such advice only increases our anger.
2095 We then become angry at our anger. We have found it's more effective to look at the
2096 actual situation that provoked the anger. More than likely it's one of the ordinary incidents
2097 that make up our daily pattern of living: a discourteous remark from someone, a rude or
2098 impatient driver, as examples. It is good for us to spot the specific situation for what it
2099 really is: a triviality. If we keep saying to ourselves, over and over, "It's a triviality," our
2100 brains will eventually get the message, and our anger will defuse. It really works.

01 In the program one sometimes hears the expression "How important is it?" When we
02 feel rage rising in us and are overwhelmed with the desire to teach someone a lesson, we
03 should ask ourselves that very question. Certainly, no situation we can encounter in
04 everyday living is as important to us as staying clean.

05 Many members find the Serenity Prayer and the Third Step useful for handling anger.
06 These and all other such program tools can keep us from acting on our anger, either
07 verbally or physically. If we allow ourselves to fight physically or argue heatedly, we are the
08 losers. It will take us days to bring our emotions back under control. Giving in to anger
09 this way produces a hangover very similar to the hangovers drug use gave us. One member
10 said the feelings experienced after getting in a fight were like a meth crash.

11 A second kind of anger is resentment, an ongoing anger often directed at a person or
12 a situation--a job, an employer or fellow employee, a family member. You should
13 recognize resentments for what they are: a threat to your recovery. You should discuss
14 resentments with your sponsor and talk about them at meetings, which are two legitimate
15 ways we have of venting our feelings. You will be in good company. Much meeting talk is
16 taken up with airing the day's resentments.

17 We are often told that the best way to handle a resentment against a person is to pray
18 for that person. Our first reaction to such advice is disbelief. How can we pray for
19 someone when what we actually want to do is kill? If you act on this advice, however, you
20 will be equally surprised to find it works! It acts to get the resentment off your shoulders
21 and to allow you to breathe easily, to function once again. All program members who have
22 honestly tried praying for those they resent attest to the fact that it works. It seems the
23 human brain can't harbor two sets of emotions at the same time. We can't simultaneously
24 nurse a grudge and also ask God to safeguard that person's welfare. It's not necessary for
25 you to come up with a long, elaborate, and probably dishonest prayer. Try something
26 simple, like, "Lord, your will be done for _____, not mine."

117 When you talk to your sponsor about your resentments, s/he may make some
128 observations that you will find unwelcome. S/he may want you to discuss your role in the
139 situation that provoked your resentment; you've gone to your sponsor for sympathy and
130 support, and now it's your mistakes that are being pointed out. If this happens, try to be
131 open-minded, to recall that you have not always been above-board with yourself in this
132 respect. We seldom owned our own mistakes, usually preferring to blame someone or
133 something else. We must become responsible for our behavior. Your sponsor isn't there to
134 please you, but to help you.

2135 If your resentments continue to be an impediment to your growth and happiness, it
2136 probably means you have to face up to some hard decisions. You may have to quit a job,
2137 get out of a marriage, move to another part of town. But it's far more preferable for you to
2138 make such a decision than face the consequences of not doing so. Your life is at stake.

2139 It's undoubtedly true that anger is the enemy of growth, but also growth is the enemy
2140 of anger. As you stay clean, you will notice that your fuse gets longer. Situations which
2141 would have sent you into a rage in your first month of recovery are felt only as an
2142 annoyance in your sixth month of recovery. A lot of your anger, particularly your
2143 spontaneous anger, is a symptom of the tension produced by drug withdrawal. This cures
2144 itself. Another kind of anger is caused by your feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, and
2145 self-dislike. As you acquire more self-confidence and get to know yourself better the
2146 source of this kind of anger will dry up.

2147 Proper exercise is a good technique for discharging the muscular and nervous tension
2148 that produces much spontaneous anger (See the section, "Exercise and diet").

2149
2150 27. Self-pity
2151

2152 Self-pity is something that we hardly ever want to admit we are feeling. We have in
2153 our addiction mastered the art of hiding self-pity even from ourselves and that habit we

54 carry over into recovery. We may, for instance, tell ourselves that we are just trying to take
55 a realistic survey of our situation and have honestly come to the conclusion that life hasn't
56 given us a fair shake. Our reasons are various: We had a bad childhood, or didn't get a
57 high school education, or an important love affair didn't work out, or our parents died when
58 we were young, or we were born into the wrong neighborhood or social class or family. As
59 many factors as there are that make up the human situation, just that many can we pick out
60 to feel sorry for ourselves about.

61 Like other traits of immaturity, self-pity provides us with a way to be self-involved, to
62 keep ourselves apart from the rest of the human race, and to deny responsibility for our
63 recovery. After all, how can we expect any determination to get well from a person whom
64 life has treated so unfairly? We see this in some addicts who insist on being "sick" or being
65 "handicapped". They program themselves for failure.

66 More than anything else, self-pity is a sort of willful spiritual blindness, where we
67 stubbornly refuse to see that life distributes good and bad to all alike. No one gets the
68 whole loaf. Most of us can think of instances such as the newspaper vendor who has no
69 legs but who is incessantly happy and cheerful on the one hand, and on the other the young
70 scion of a wealthy family who has everything but commits suicide. Clearly, it is not the
71 situation we are placed in but our response to it that indicates how happy we are going to
72 be.

73 Like most of our other negative emotions, we indulge in self-pity for ulterior
74 purposes. First, it takes the pressure off us to start making all these scary changes that
75 people in the program are trying to get us to make, and secondly, it keeps us tantalizingly
76 close to our game. The belief that the world sucks or that we got all the bad breaks was
77 usually quite necessary for our coping and using drugs. How else could we excuse an act
78 so clearly self-destructive?

79 One subtle form self-pity takes is when we endlessly attempt to uncover the "real
80 causes" of our addiction. Another form of self-pity occurs when we exaggerate the

2181 importance of a trivial situation. A large and unexpected bill means we will be forever in
2182 debt. A date goes against our expectations and we feel we will never be able to function
2183 normally in social situations or get the sexual closeness we want. How often have we heard
2184 a member moan, "I'll never get laid." If we act this way we are once again expressing
2185 distrust in God's timetable for our recovery.

2186 Naturally, we don't like to have our self-pity pointed out to us. Like the child in a
2187 sulk, we may reject all comforting. One newcomer, accused of feeling sorry for himself,
2188 angrily replied, "I have to. None of you would feel sorry for me!"

2189 Traveling down memory lane is a sure way to end up on the pity pot. At this early
2190 point in our recovery, none of us has learned to handle the past objectively. We end up
2191 pulling out from our old duffle bag and lovingly caressing all the hurts of the past, the
2192 childhood embarrassments, the broken romances, the quarrels we could have won had we
2193 only said such-and-such. These excursions into the past are often accompanied by our
2194 favorite cry music played on the stereo.

2195 What happens eventually is that we get sick from wandering in the bag of self-pity,
2196 fed up with being so much into our own problems. It's a little bit like living inside a
2197 garment bag. If we really take our recovery seriously, we will soon reach out to others and
2198 admit that our binge of emotion was self-pity. Perhaps we'll enjoy a good laugh at
2199 ourselves as we recount the episode at a meeting.

2200 The best cure for self-pity is gratitude. If we develop the daily habit of gratitude and
2201 make a business of gratitude, rather than just an occasional effort at it, our problems with
2202 self-pity will take care of themselves. This will come about if we make the practice of
2203 working the Tenth Step at a particular time every day. We will learn to look at life's ledger
2204 a little more realistically. We always feel a little embarrassed at our self-pitying behavior
2205 when an objective self-inventory brings home to us how unbelievably lucky we are.
2206 Gratitude is one of the most therapeutic side-effects of Twelfth Step work, too.

207 As we continue to stay clean, we will come to have faith in the timetable of our
208 recovery. We will quit lamenting what we don't have and realize that, though we may not
209 always get what we want, we always get what we need.

210
211 28. Other addictions: work, gambling, compulsive sex

212
213 We have already pointed out how easily the addict can transfer his addiction from
214 one drug to another. Our experience has shown us that addicts can also easily fall into
215 certain patterns of behavior almost addictively. The effect of these activities is to separate
216 us from the program and its spiritual resources, and ultimately to jeopardize our staying
217 clean.

218 The new member who maintains a healthy system of daily self-inventory via the Tenth
219 Step (see "Getting into the Steps") will discover that much of his behavior has overtones of
220 addiction in it. For instance, consider carrying out a personal vendetta. If we plot to take
221 revenge on a person or institution, we will encounter a familiar complex of feelings and
222 thoughts. First of all, our thinking will tend to become obsessional—all of our waking
223 moments will be filled with the details of the plan. We will notice our hearts beating faster
224 at the thought that justice will finally be ours. Then there is the ultimate crash when some
225 aspect of the plan goes wrong or we lose interest in it. What are these other than the
226 symptoms of thought and feeling that copping gave us? We must learn to recognize such
227 patterns whenever they occur for what they are: We are playing the old game again,
228 perhaps with different pieces.

229 So many are the ways that we can behave addictively that one member said, "Every
230 week I find a new symptom of my addiction I have to deal with." However, we shouldn't be
231 discouraged that so much of the using person is still with us. The program offers us a very
232 effective way to keep our addictive natures at bay.

2 3 Although there are other such problems, particularly food addiction, in this section
:234 we want to discuss three particular forms of addictive behavior: work, gambling, and sex.
2 5 These have spelled great trouble for many of our members.

2 6 It's easy for us to convince ourselves that total absorption in our work is healthy. For
2237 so many years we were irresponsible and half-hearted employers or employees, or perhaps
2 38 couldn't even hold down a job. Now, with the gift of recovery, we have the chance to do
2239 things right. We may find ourselves working until nine or ten p.m., taking work home with
2240 us and working over the weekend. The recovering addict who has become a workaholic
2 41 (that's what we call it) is often devastated when the time for vacation comes around, and
2242 may even resist going on a vacation. What is he going to do with his time? Without the
2 43 structure that his addiction to work gave him, he finds himself becoming depressed.

2244 The workaholic lifestyle violates a fundamental principle of recovery, namely, the
2245 golden mean moderation. We seek to attain moderation, never excess, in all the important
2 46 areas of our recovery. We must devote time to friendships, to learning how to play, to the
2 47 development of our talents, as well as to our work. We neglect any of these areas of our
2 48 lives at great danger to our emotional stability.

2249 We think it is extremely important for the recovering addict to learn how to play. Not
2250 only human beings, but apparently all mammals, find play enjoyable. Play in humans takes
2251 many forms, from parlor games to organized team sports, but they all fulfill the same
2252 purpose: In play we lose our obsessional concern with ourselves and come in contact with
2253 our vitality. To thoroughly enjoy play, we must think well of ourselves, because part of the
2254 fun of play is to be able to laugh at our own mistakes. One member said that one of the
2255 most exciting experiences of her recovery was playing volleyball with other program people
2256 at a convention. Through the humor and vitality of the game, the players seemed to be re-
2257 affirming their bond as recovering addicts.

2258 The workaholic rejects such pleasures. Everything for the workaholic is deadly
2259 serious, and spontaneity, the true essence of play, finds no place in life. Work has become

60 a coffin because, like all true addicts, the workaholic has deadened feelings. In addition,
61 overwork undermines any reasonable meeting schedule and pushes the program out of the
62 workaholic's life. Unfortunately, the workaholic usually won't listen to the warning advice
63 of sponsor or program friends. As was the case with drugs, the workaholic justifies an
64 addictive lifestyle by an endless series of excuses. "I just have this one more project to get
65 out of the way and then I'll get back to meetings." There is, of course, always another
66 project up ahead. What the workaholic is really telling us is that he or she has discovered
67 something more important than staying clean. If the workaholic persists in this idea, the
68 result is predictable.

69 Gambling is another pitfall for the recovering addict. More than almost any other
70 non-drug oriented obsessional activity, gambling can spell instant ruin for us. We believe
71 that the following warning accurately summarizes our group experience: The recovering
72 addict should not gamble. To us the risks outweigh any conceivable benefits. The
73 experience of compulsive gamblers tells us that gambling is a way of satisfying certain
74 deeply felt masochistic needs. The drug addict has such needs in abundance. It often
75 seemed that in our addiction we were intentionally seeking pain. Thus, we recovering
76 addicts are a set-up for a gambling problem. Some of us have indulged in such innocent-
77 seeming activities as purchasing lottery tickets, found that these activities opened up
78 emotions which seemed to be the same feelings copping gave us, recognized the danger,
79 and stopped. However, as is the case with any other compulsive activity, it is easier not to
80 start gambling than it is to stop.

81 Sex can become another way of avoiding reality. We can easily make cruising and the
82 search for sex a new and all-consuming game. When we add the element of romance, we
83 have a truly potent and addictive mixture. We use the sex/romance mixture to change our
84 moods and to provide excitement, just as we did with drugs.

Another point for us to keep in mind is that most of us feel some measure of guilt about casual sex, and thus will keep our behavior a secret from others. For the recovering addict, however, secretive behavior is always dangerous.

Narcotics Anonymous is not anti-sex. On the contrary, we see the job of developing the healthy use of our sexual appetites as one of the most important and pleasurable challenges of recovery. Again, the goal we strive for is moderation. Sex should occupy its proper place in our lives; it shouldn't be wielding the whip over us.

29. Should I seek counseling?

Note to WLC members - most of the material in this section was very opinionated, inappropriate, and has been deleted. However, there may be one or two good paragraphs of practical advice that could be written utilizing the remaining text below under this heading. Please feel free to write them and bring them to Detroit.

The decision of whether or not to seek the help of a professional counselor is one some of us in the program consider.

What might cause the newcomer to seek counseling? It may be fears of anxieties or a bout of depression that the newcomer can't seem to deal with in terms of the program. However, such emotional instabilities occur with great frequency early in the program. They are often the inevitable symptoms of making the adjustment to a life without drugs. Usually time is all the treatment we need.

Certain of us contemplate getting counseling later in our recovery because we find ourselves stuck and want the therapist to guide us onto new ground. We feel we need an outsider to take an objective and experienced look at our living patterns and to make concrete suggestions. In such situations, the help a counselor provides can be very useful, and viewing the counselor as a guide who walks along with but perhaps a little ahead of his client is a very healthy attitude to take.

12 When seeking a therapist, ask around, consult your sponsor. Before you commit
13 yourself to any therapy, remember you have a right to know your therapist's views about
14 addiction.

15
16 30. Diet and exercise
17

18 We have stressed that addiction is a three-fold disease: mental, physical, spiritual.
19 Much of our advice has dealt with the first and last of these. In this section we discuss how
20 to deal with the physical part of the disease through two powerful tools: diet and exercise.

21 The mention of these two words may make us cringe. In our addiction, diet and
22 exercise received attention only insofar as we could work them around our drug using. As
23 our addiction progressed, they received less and less attention. Our disregard for our basic
24 physical condition coupled with the devastation that drugs produced left us physically
25 wrecked. But now, staying clean, we have a chance to undo the damage. Those of us in the
26 program who have intelligently followed a plan for exercise and diet feel we are now in
27 better physical shape than ever before.

28 The process of physically rebuilding ourselves, like so much else in the program, is
29 work. But it is necessary if we are to enjoy a full measure of self respect. We have to face
30 ourselves in the mirror every day; if we like the appearance of the person we see there, it's
31 easier to fall into the habit of self-respect which is so essential to our mental well-being.

32 We can't claim to advise you on "the diet" or "the exercise plan" to follow. We can
33 give you some pointers, but remember that nothing can be accomplished overnight and that
34 moderation is the backbone of any intelligent plan. Since, as addicts, we tend to take
35 everything to extremes and to try to make up for lost time, we need to remember that the
36 idea of physical recovery must be approached with moderation and patience. Don't be
37 disappointed by your performance. Give yourself a break.

2338 If we are to enjoy a measure of physical health we can no longer consider our bodies
2339 as repositories for junk food. Like any other important aspect of our lives, diet must be
2340 planned and eating can no longer be done on impulse or simply when it is convenient.

2341 For addicts, breakfast is probably the most important meal of the day. Sailing into
2342 the day with a head full of coffee and an empty stomach is a sure invitation to a later crash.
2343 Anger, short-temperedness, depression and binges of self-will can be some of the mental
2344 results of ignoring the first meal of the day.

2345 Food can affect your mood and energy levels. As you continue to assume
2346 responsibility for the body you live in, you will develop a sixth sense about your physical
2347 response to various foods, to what and how much you eat. Your body will become an ally
2348 in your recovery.

2349 We suggest you eat three balanced meals a day. Try to stay away from sugars and fats
2350 as much as possible and to concentrate on foods high in protein—milk, fish, meat, cheese,
2351 eggs. Remember to include plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit in your diet. Drink plenty
2352 of liquids (2-4 glasses of water a day).

2353 Eating can also be a rewarding social event. Try to plan healthy meals in a healthy
2354 environment, perhaps with program people. Meals can be important occasions for sharing.

2355 Many people in the program use vitamin and mineral supplements. These are a
2356 matter of personal discretion. If used, they should be used in moderation, since even
2357 something as innocent as vitamin supplements can develop into a compulsive indulgence.

2358 Let's consider the subject of sports and exercise. About the only consideration we
2359 gave to exercise in our using days was to put down those who engaged in it. But if we are to
2360 grow physically, as well as spiritually and mentally, we have to abandon such judgments.
2361 We live in bodies for which we are responsible.

2362 Exercise can be a unique method for releasing day-to-day tension and frustration.
2363 Also, as does eating, it can provide a means for socializing. Many program members are
2364 into activities such as jogging, weight lifting, basketball and swimming. Planning such

5 activities with program members is a way of strengthening your commitment to the
6 Fellowship.

7 Exercise acts to increase our self-esteem, not only because it makes us look and feel
8 better, but because it provides tangible evidence that we can set goals for ourselves and
9 develop a program to meet them.

0 Physically, exercise does two things:

- 1 1) builds cardiovascular stamina; and
- 2 2) develops muscle tone.

3 Jogging, a good exercise because anyone can do it, does the former but not too much
4 of the latter. Weight-lifting accomplishes the latter but not the former. Swimming does
5 both.

6 It is important, whatever exercise you choose, to set goals you can fulfill. Ten minutes
7 of jogging actually accomplished is better than a grandiose scheme for a half hour of
8 jogging which you cannot even attempt because it intimidates you. Start small. There is no
9 way to get in shape overnight. Above all, be assertive. Ask around. Seek the advice and
10 support of those who are into what you are trying to do. It is a way of meeting new friends.
11 Generally people who are exercise and sports veterans are happy to share their expertise.
12 For instance, those into weight-lifting are usually happy to help you develop a lifting plan.
13 Pool lifeguards are usually accommodating about giving the novice swimmer pointers.
14 Aside from the direct physical benefits exercise gives us, the opportunity to work with
15 others yields many beneficial side effects.

36
37 31. Changes
38

39 There is an expression in the program, "If the only thing you do is don't use, then
40 you'll use." This expression indicates we recovering addicts are simply too sick to survive

without making changes. And we have found those changes must take place in all areas of our lives.

Most of us, before coming into the Narcotics Anonymous program, had tried at one time or another to stay clean without making changes in our lives. After staying off drugs for a few days we began to feel better physically. In fact, we found it surprisingly easy not to use. But what happened as the newness of staying clean wore off was that our lives began to seem empty and meaningless. There seemed to be no direction, nothing to work toward. Eventually, we came to view the prospect of living life without drugs terrifying. Being essentially the same people we were when we had stopped using and having no defense against taking the first drug, we used again. Looking back on such experiences we see now that we really had no choice. We had no program to help us deal with our addiction. And we had vastly underestimated the extent of our sickness.

Quitting doesn't count. As Mark Twain said, "Quitting smoking is easy. I've done it a thousand times." It's staying quit that's the problem. And to do that we need to make sweeping changes in our lives. If we are to have any success at staying clean over the long run and finding the happy life we all want, we should work on changing our attitudes. Specifically, we must make changes in our attitudes and in our behavior.

One of the first habits we must work to change is the habit of seeing ourselves as outsiders, outside society, outside the law. We must begin to think of ourselves as useful, contributing members of society, sharing with all others in our society certain social and emotional needs. The old head set, "me against the world," has to be abandoned, as difficult as it is to do. We came to see as myth the idea that we expressed our individual differences through the use of drugs. When we begin to see the drug culture for what it actually is, a culture of slavery, we will have made great progress. If we are clean we aren't slaves to a connection or to hustling. Our opportunities are virtually unlimited. For the first time we have a chance at true joy.

17 Another attitude that has to be changed is the attitude of secretiveness. Along with
18 making decisions to stay away from a drug one day at a time we make the decision to share
19 our thoughts and feelings with others. Only in this way can we avoid a return to drug-
20 oriented behavior.

21 And we have to make behavioral changes, too. Obviously, we have to stay away from
22 drugs and paraphernalia and from the territory and persons who were involved in our
23 using. But it is equally important to make other changes, to develop the habit of acting out
24 of self-respect rather than self-loathing, to learn restraint of tongue, to acquire the habit of
25 acting against our impulsiveness and compulsiveness. Our recovery will be very precarious
26 if we do not learn to avoid acting out our anger verbally and physically. One member,
27 whose experience is echoed by many others, said that most of his growth came from
28 learning to keep his mouth shut at the right times. If we have not developed our
29 assertiveness sufficiently to express our needs in a given situation without anger, then the
30 next best thing is to "turn the situation over," as the program expression goes, which really
31 means we decide not to speak or act angrily.

32 One of the main benefits of taking Steps Four through Seven is that by doing so we
33 devise a clear plan for making the changes needed (See "Getting into the Steps"). Until we
34 do this, we may not have much of a sense of what needs to be done. But it is never too
35 early to start making behavioral changes. Some sponsors advise making small changes just
36 for the sake of making changes. If you usually wash your face before brushing your teeth,
37 reverse the order. Or try driving a different way to or from work or a meeting. Such
38 suggestions may sound trivial but they can accomplish two very nontrivial changes in your
39 attitudes. They will commit you to the concept of a new life built through change, and they
40 will demonstrate that you are not ruled completely by your old habits.

41 Obviously some of our attitudes and behavior will be easier to change than others.
42 Some changes we will resist very strongly. But our "NEVER" attitude must be changed to a

"NEVER SAY `NEVER'" attitude. If you find yourself saying "This I cannot give up," try adding an open-minded "yet" to the sentence.

32. Getting into the Steps

By attending the meetings and getting involved in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, we no longer feel we are waging a solitary battle to stay clean. We know others have done it, and we begin to believe we can learn from their advice and direction. The relief we experience on coming into Narcotics Anonymous and discovering that others have been where we are and have survived is enormous. We find we are loved and accepted for what we are, not for what we have pretended to be. No one is shocked by our past; in fact, we are encouraged to talk about it.

We may experience a sense of elation that lasts weeks or even months (Sometimes this feeling is called "being on a pink cloud." The implication is that, as all clouds must eventually disperse, so the pink cloud must come to an end). During this initial period of euphoria--if we experience it; many don't--it seems that staying clean requires almost no effort. Every day is like a new toy. But sooner or later rude reality intrudes. The initial euphoria, enjoyable as it was, comes to an end. Our love affair with the program is over. We may find ourselves bent out of shape with anger, resentments, anxieties, all those demons we thought we had left behind with our using. One of our juiciest resentments is that the good feelings didn't last. What did we, or the program, do wrong? "It's not fair!" we howl.

At this point we begin to discover what those newcomers who experienced no elation in their early days have known all along--that staying clean involves work. We can't stay clean on the good vibes of the Fellowship alone.

468 Naturally, if we experience this letdown, we want to know what to do. Our sponsors
469 or others in the program then begin to suggest that we examine the applications of certain
470 principles, called Steps, to our lives.

471 What are the Steps?

472 Think of building a clean life for yourself as you would think of building a house. As
473 mortar, brick, wood, nails and plasterboard are to a house, so must the Steps be to your
474 recovery. No materials, no house; no Steps, no lasting recovery. It's that simple.

475 The Steps--there are twelve of them--act to change us as persons. If we only stay
476 clean--not that such would be possible for long--we merely go from being sick using addicts
477 to sick non-using addicts. Addiction does not come in packets or pills or bottles--it comes
478 in us. We are damaged people and it's unrealistic to pretend otherwise. We are isolated,
479 out of touch with ourselves, others, God. To survive we need to reorganize our inner and
480 outer lives. The Steps help us to accomplish that.

481 The First Step requires us to admit we are powerless over our addiction, and that our
482 lives had become unmanageable. It is the one step we must begin to work as soon as we
483 come into Narcotics Anonymous, and further, to continue to work each and every day of
484 our lives. Whenever we identify with a speaker at a meeting, or speak ourselves, we are
485 working the First Step. Every time we help a still suffering addict, the gratitude that we
486 experience for our own recovery is actually work done on the First Step. The admission of
487 powerlessness over our addiction must be complete--no reservations or hedging with
488 statements such as "Well, meth did get me in a lot of trouble; but pot, that's something
489 else." We must admit and accept the indisputable fact that our addiction was in us, not in
490 the drugs we took; in short, that we are powerless over all mood changing chemicals. It is
491 hardly possible for us to take the First Step perfectly when we come into Narcotics
492 Anonymous--that requires an insight into our addiction that we don't yet have. But as we
493 continue to stay clean, we get a clearer idea of how very central using drugs was to our life.
494 We lived to use and used to live.

4 5 In the Second Step we are asked to believe that a power greater than ourselves--to
496 which the Steps attach the label God but which we don't need for the moment to define--
7 can restore us to sanity. How do we come by this belief that we can get well? How do we
4 8 decide something can happen which is contrary to all our experience? With us events
499 always went from bad to worse; they never went the other way. Yet the Second Step
500 requires us to believe in hope, to have faith. In fact, if we had proof of something,
501 believing it would require no faith at all. Nevertheless, in Narcotics Anonymous we are
502 provided with a kind of proof. Look around you. You will see people who were once
503 where you are, and who are now staying clean.

504 As we continue to stay clean we will encounter many living problems which, like
505 drugs, cannot be solved by the application of will power alone. We may find ourselves
506 devastated by an emotional crisis, exhausted by an ongoing temperamental conflict with a
507 fellow employee, too emotionally caught up in the recovery of someone we are sponsoring.
508 When we are new, everything seems to be a crisis. The Third Step, which is worked on a
509 daily basis, allows such matters to be taken out of our hands. In any situation we do the
510 best we can do and leave the rest to God. Our recovery is no longer our own project.

511 Step Four enables us at last to come to terms with our past and with what we are.
512 Opinions differ on how soon after coming into the program the newcomer should start on
513 the step. Many members think that six months is a long enough waiting period. Certainly,
514 an earnest effort at the Step should be begun in the first year. It is usually stressed that the
515 inventory this step requires should be done with pen and paper. Vague inventories, "Yeah,
516 I was a little dishonest," will inevitably result in a lot of self-deceit. How long could a
517 grocer, for instance, stay in business if he conducted his yearly inventory just by talking to
518 himself? "I see some cans of tomatoes over there; and here's some detergent." In fact, the
519 comparison of taking the Fourth Step to a business inventory is a fairly accurate one. It
520 should be done dispassionately--that is, without a lot of self-blame. It should be written

21 down. It should be done more than once. Some members do the Fourth Step at a fixed
22 time every year.

23 Taking this Fourth Step can be stressful. You should have all your supports available
24 when taking it. Stay in close touch with meetings and your sponsor.

25 When we get our inventory down on paper, the result is electrifying. We begin to see
26 ourselves for the first time as we really are--there's some bad in us, and a lot more good
27 than we had ever thought. One member compared taking the Fourth Step to pouring
28 developer over a photographic plate and watching an image emerge. The image is us. We
29 finally come to recognize ourselves as human beings. It is the beginning of the end of our
30 isolation. The walls are coming down.

31 However, if we stop the inventory process at the Fourth Step, our task of discovering
32 that we are human isn't complete. We haven't used what we've found to reach out to
33 others, to build a bond with the rest of the human race. We may have a better idea of what
34 we are, but others, including God, still haven't let us know that it's all right to be who we
35 are. We may still feel unique, isolated, unforgivable. Probably, we all imagine we have
36 committed several unpardonable sins.

37 It is in taking the Fifth Step that we put these fears to rest. We reveal to God,
38 ourselves, and another human being the "exact nature of our wrongs," that is, those facts
39 about ourselves we have uncovered in our Fourth Step inventory. We know what we have
40 found and since, presumably, we have sought God's guidance in the inventory taking, so
41 does He. It only remains to tell "another human being." Who? The consensus of opinion
42 is that it needn't be another program member, although it usually is. It should, however, be
43 someone whose maturity, judgment, and ability to keep silence you respect.

44 The Fifth Step is a personal experience. Be certain the person you have chosen
45 knows what you are requiring of him or her. Because of our many fears about taking the
46 Step, we often want to slide into it in a casual way during a social situation, almost as an
47 afterthought. On the contrary, it should be a very structured event. Plan to go somewhere

18 where you both will be alone and absolutely undisturbed, particularly by telephone, for
2549 several hours, an entire afternoon, preferably.

50 You shouldn't worry too much about whether what you reveal on the Fifth Step will
2551 be kept in confidence. It undoubtedly will, but that is probably not the only or even the
2552 best reason the communication is considered privileged. The taking of the Step is an act of
2553 self-respect on both your parts. You prove yourself to be an adult worthy of privacy--the
2554 other person shows he or she is mature enough to decline the temptation to gossip.

2555 As someone once said, if ever there is a time for courage in the program, this is it.
2556 With fear and trepidation one newcomer asked his sponsor how he should begin the step.
2557 "It's easy," was the answer. "Just think of two or three things you told yourself you could
2558 never tell anyone, and tell them first." Some of us expect to be denounced, consoled, or
2559 pitied for being so sick. These things do not happen. Usually the respondent listens
2560 politely, may occasionally ask for clarification, even may share one of his or her own
2561 experiences--this last to let you know you aren't alone. He or she does this only rarely,
2562 since it has to be your show.

2563 Those who have taken the Fifth Step may compare it with several things. One said it
2564 is like being handed water after being on the desert all your life. Another said that it is like
2565 finally breaking out of a glass prison. We recovering addicts find the Fifth Step one of the
2566 most baffling, frightening, exciting and exhilarating events of our lives. Once we take it we
2567 can never be the same again. We close the door on the old life.

2568 More than anything else, the Fourth and Fifth Steps give us a direction in which to
2569 travel. We at least know what we are like, our strengths and weaknesses. Now the real
2570 work begins. We must start the business of improving the human assets which will
2571 strengthen our recovery, eliminate the character defects which might tempt us to re-enter
2572 our game or use again.

2573 The Sixth and Seventh Steps provide us with a systematic way of changing. Narcotics
2574 Anonymous is not a self-improvement program as such. But we have discovered that we

5 cannot continue to barge recklessly through life, using other people and venting our
6 immaturity on everyone around us, and still stay clean. If we do not grow, we die. We must
7 work to rid ourselves of our problem, impatience, self-pity, all the other defects of
8 character that are inevitable result of a using life. We must discover gentleness,
9 compassion, the ability to put ourselves in the other person's place, forgiveness. We must
0 learn to extend ourselves to others. The idea that we can be possessively jealous of a few,
1 indifferent to the many, and the sworn enemy of anyone has to be abandoned. Every time
2 we say "no!" to the worse part of us, it gives us a measure of self-respect. Thus, the result of
3 self-improvement is not only that we stay clean--it is self-love.

4 Steps Eight and Nine help us put the past in its proper place. The past need never
5 haunt you again. You should wait until you have accumulated some clean time before you
6 begin these Steps. A great deal of damage, to yourself and others, may be done by a
7 premature attempt to right the wrongs of the past. Your efforts to make restitution and
8 apologies, for instance, to other players of your game, usually won't be understood, and
9 would involve your getting in touch with your game again--a dangerous business. Unless
0 we have a little time in the program, we won't have a clear idea of how amends should be
1 made. However, during your first year, you can do something on these steps. Compile a
2 mental list of those you have wronged, for example, and ask others in the program how
3 they have come to terms with their pasts. You should avail yourself of your sponsor's
4 advice before you begin either of these Steps.

5 The Tenth Step is a continual application on a daily basis of the principle of moral
6 inventory of the Fourth Step. It provides us with a way of righting our daily mistakes--
7 namely, by admitting them. We "continued to take personal inventory and when we were
8 wrong, promptly admitted it." Why admit a wrong rather than apologize for it? Our
9 apologies are often required but they are of no value unless they are preceded by an honest
0 admission to ourselves that we have erred. How readily apologies fell from our mouths
11 during our using--but mentally we still continued to judge and blame others for our

mistakes. The Tenth Step requires a totally different approach to the problem of righting wrongs: We begin by recognizing our own role in our behavior. The time for blaming others is past. We learn to take total responsibility for our own lives.

The Tenth Step is one of those Steps, along with Steps One, Two, Three and Eleven, that the beginner can start on immediately. No one has ever been harmed by using the Step too soon. The sooner we make ourselves accountable for our behavior, the better. If we know that a mistake will require an admission of wrong to ourselves and then an apology to someone else, we are much less likely to indulge in extravagant and childish behavior.

Many program members not only work the Step throughout the day but precede their evening prayers with a brief survey of their thinking and behavior during that day, searching in particular for self-justifying and self-willed behavior, and for traces of the old game in daily activities. We also at this time try to give ourselves credit for the things, and there are many of them, that we have done right. We can then go to sleep with a good conscience, one of the most priceless gifts of the program.

We have already indicated that for us recovering addicts, a spiritual basis for living has to be a main goal (See the section, "Prayer: the spiritual part"). The Third and Eleventh Steps are our primary tools for becoming spiritual people. It is a good policy to set aside a specific time in the day to meditate, to think about who we are, where we want to go, to remind ourselves of the sources of our help. The daily activities of our new lives are compelling; it is altogether too easy for us addicts, who are compulsive by nature, to get caught up in a daily routine in which we forget our primary purpose. We may find ourselves going day after day with no systematic attempt at meditation or prayer, reassuring ourselves, perhaps, that we will pray tomorrow. We should take the Eleventh Step on a daily basis; like everything else of value in life, it requires self-discipline. As we have indicated, setting aside a particular time for taking the Eleventh Step is helpful. Many program members prefer either early morning or late evening. Above all, it is necessary to

29 be alone without distractions. Reading spiritually oriented literature may be a help. Each
30 person in the program has favorite books on spiritual growth. Ask around.

31 In the Twelfth Step we learn to reach out to others. After we have experienced some
32 spiritual growth through applying the other steps in the program, we are ready to help
33 others. For most of us, the act of helping others is very unfamiliar. But the reason for
34 doing it is very simple. In helping them, we help ourselves. The still suffering addict
35 reminds us of who we once were, and gives us an insight into our addiction that we cannot
36 obtain any other way. Doing Twelfth Step work puts us face to face with our recovery: We
37 see how far we have come.

38 What is known as a Twelfth Step call is a contact made with a still using or barely
39 clean addict outside the Narcotics Anonymous meeting rooms. It may take place in the
40 addict's home, or in a rehab, jail, or detox. The call may have been initiated through a
41 personal referral or a call to the Narcotics Anonymous phonenumber.

42 Six months or so of clean time is adequate preparation for you to begin helping
43 others, but remember to go on a call with a more experienced member of the program.
44 There are other rules you should remember, too. Men Twelfth Step men, women Twelfth
45 Step women. You should not Twelfth Step members of your own family or fellow game
46 players. Let someone else in the program do it. As much as you may want to, you cannot
47 help such people. It is impossible for them to see you as a source of help. To them you are
48 still a fellow player of the game.

49 Doing Twelfth Step work is essential to our growth, but it requires caution. Not only
50 our own welfare but the welfare of others is involved. You must discipline yourself to
51 accept the experience of those who have been in the program longer than you and defer to
52 their judgment. At this particular point in your recovery, the most important asset you can
53 take on a Twelfth Step call is the example of your own staying clean. Don't try to lay on the
54 still suffering addict a wisdom you can't possibly have. We share our "experience, strength
55 and hope." It is best to think of yourself merely as a messenger, carrying the message from

656 one place to another. Whether the message is accepted or not is not up to you; it is up to
2657 God. Its acceptance requires the other person's readiness, which is a function of how far
2658 down on the ladder of addiction that person has gone. You can't sell anyone on recovery.
659 As someone once said, "If they aren't ready, it doesn't make any difference what you tell
2660 them. And if they are ready, it doesn't make a lot of difference what you tell them, either."
661 The result is out of your hands. It is the effort which helps you.

2662 This has been a necessarily brief survey of the Steps. The newcomer who wishes to
2663 broaden and deepen his knowledge of the Steps should make Step meetings a regular part
2664 of his meeting schedule. The systematic application of the Steps to our daily lives will keep
2665 us in fit mental and spiritual condition, and as long as we are spiritually and mentally fit, we
2666 will not use.