



Questions & Answers on Sponsorship

This is VA World Services approved literature. Violence Anonymous® is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from violence. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop thinking or acting violently. There are no dues or fees for VA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. VA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other violence addicts to achieve sobriety.

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What is sponsorship?

Violence Anonymous takes inspiration from Alcoholics Anonymous, which would not exist if it hadn't begun with sponsorship.

When Bill W., only a few months sober, was stricken with a powerful urge to drink, this thought came to him: “You need another alcoholic to talk to. You need another alcoholic just as much as he needs you!” He found Dr. Bob, who had been trying desperately and unsuccessfully to stop drinking, and out of their common need A.A. was born. The word “sponsor” was not used then; the Twelve Steps had not been written; but Bill carried the message to Dr. Bob, who in turn safeguarded his own sobriety by sponsoring countless other alcoholics. Through sharing, both of the co-founders of A.A. discovered their own sober lives could be enriched beyond measure.

What does VA mean by sponsorship?

A violence addict who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another violence addict who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through VA. When we first begin to attend VA meetings, we may feel confused and sick and apprehensive. Although people at meetings respond to our questions willingly, that alone isn't enough. Many other questions occur to us between meetings; we find that we need constant, close support as we begin learning how to "live sober in VA." So we select a VA member with whom we can feel comfortable, someone with whom we can talk freely and confidentially, and we ask that person to be our sponsor.

Whether you are a newcomer who is hesitant about "bothering" anyone, or a member who has been around for some time trying to go it alone, sponsorship is yours for the asking. We urge you: Do not delay. Violence addicts recovered in VA want to share what they have learned with other addicts. We know from experience that our own sobriety is greatly strengthened when we give it away! Sponsorship can also mean the responsibility the group as a whole has for helping the newcomer. Today, more and more violence addicts are arriving at their first VA meeting and have had no prior contact with VA. They have not contacted VA; no member has made a "Twelfth Step call" to them. So, especially for such newcomers, groups are recognizing the need to provide some form of sponsorship help. In many successful groups, sponsorship is one of the most important planned activities of the members. Sponsorship responsibility is unwritten and informal, but it is a basic part of the VA approach to recovery from violence and drama through the Twelve Steps. Sponsorship can be a long term relationship. We hope that this pamphlet will provide answers to some of the often-asked questions about the rewarding two-way street called sponsorship — for people who may be seeking sponsors; for VA members who want to share their sobriety through sponsorship; and for groups that wish to develop sponsorship activity (see what procedures can a group set up to sponsor new members?).

Some ways the Drama Triangle Roles can be played out in Sponsorship and some ideas of how to minimize that.

Sponsee as Victim: letting sponsors do all the work, having excuses for not calling or following up on suggestions. "Nothing will work - I'm a hopeless case, unlike you".

How to minimize: Process triggers around seeing yourself as a victim. Express feelings/needs out loud - "I'm afraid, ashamed, can't find private space". Connect with your Higher Power.

Sponsee as Rescuer: making things easy for your sponsor at the expense of your own needs. Believing you are burdening your sponsor, therefore not telling all the details of the situation, shortening the interaction or minimizing your need for support.

How to minimize: Process triggers around seeing yourself as a rescuer. Practice trusting another with more and more of your story. Learn to ask for what you need. Tell your sponsor what you are afraid to talk about.

Sponsee as Persecutor: judgmental “I have it harder than you,” Justifying your thinking or behavior. Gossiping about your sponsor behind their back.

How to minimize: Process triggers around thinking or acting like a persecutor. Share your feelings more than your judgements. Attend meetings, listen, talk to others.

Sponsor as Victim: Reluctant to pick up the phone or return a call. Saying things from the victim's position. “Why didn’t you...?” “I’m not good enough to be a sponsor.”

How to minimize: Process triggers around seeing yourself as a victim. Practice rigorous honesty about your needs; process any triggers arising from sponsee’s issues.

Sponsor as Rescuer: More sponsees than you can comfortably handle. Trying to solve all of your sponsee’s problems. Giving unsolicited advice. Trying to fix them instead of mirroring what you heard them say. Dominating/interrupting conversations with your stories, quotes, suggestions, resources.

How to minimize: Call your own sponsor or another member to process your trauma around the rescuing role and need for significance.

Sponsor as Persecutor: Dominating/interrupting conversations with your stories, quotes, suggestions, resources. Using a heavy-handed tone, “old-school, authoritarian. “You should have...?” Using a harsh tone while asking “Why weren’t you at the meeting?” Why didn’t you leave that job or relationship, like I suggested?” “How serious are you about your recovery?”

How to minimize: Trigger process why you think others need to pursue recovery in your way or pace, etc, or why it’s important to you to have a “star sponsee”?

How does sponsorship help the newcomer?

Having the sponsor gives a newcomer at least one person who cares and understands the situation fully. The sponsor provides a safe space without embarrassment when doubts, questions or problems linked to violence arise. Sponsorship gives the newcomer an understanding, empathetic friend when one is needed most. Sponsorship can also provide a bridge enabling the new person to meet other violence addicts. Sponsors encourage newcomers to get a home group and attend other meetings.

How should a sponsor be chosen?

Finding a sponsor is as informal as everything else in VA. Often, the new person simply approaches a more experienced member who seems compatible, and asks that member to be a sponsor. Most VAs are happy and grateful to receive such a request. Sometimes finding a sponsor in VA can take time, so be patient. It's only reasonable to seek a member who seems to be using the VA program successfully in everyday life. Most VAs find it helpful to choose a sponsor with similar experience to their own although that is not always needed. There are no specific rules, but a good sponsor probably should have a year or more in the program, preferably worked through Step 5, is processing triggers on a regular basis, and uses the VA Tools successfully.

Should sponsor and newcomer be as much alike as possible?

Often, a newcomer feels most at ease with a sponsor of similar background, experience and interests. On the other hand, many VA's say they were greatly helped by sponsors totally unlike themselves. Perhaps their attention was then focused on the most important things that any sponsor and newcomer have in common: violence and recovery in VA. Sometimes the differences between sponsor and newcomer call into question any rigid boundaries we may be holding. Regardless, a sponsor relationship is an opportunity to practice honesty, openness and willingness. For guidelines on healthy boundaries see the boundary styles page <https://violenceanonymous.org/index.php/boundary-styles/>

VA experience historically suggested that it is best for men to sponsor men, and women to sponsor women. This custom usually helps our members stay focused on the VA program. Some gay men and lesbians feel an opposite-sex sponsor is more appropriate for similar reasons. The key idea for any and all gender identities is that the sponsor/sponsee relationship is most beneficial when romantic and/or sexual intrigue are not involved. The safety and recovery of both individuals should be the most important priorities.

Must the newcomer agree with everything the sponsor says?

No. If the sponsor's ideas sound strange or unclear, the newcomer is encouraged to speak up and ask questions. This may be difficult for the VA whose life experience has resulted in fear of "authority figures". Writing down what you want to say first can be helpful. The sponsor/sponsee relationship is supposed to be easy and open, one in which both parties talk freely and honestly. The VA program is simple, but it didn't seem that way to many of us at first. Often, we learned by asking questions - at meetings, after-meetings or most especially in conversations with our sponsors.

What if the sponsor is unavailable when needed?

It is the whole VA program — not the individual's sponsor — that maintains the VA's recovery. Sponsorship is just the best way we know of introducing a newcomer to the program and helping them continue to work the 12 steps and use the tools of VA. We have many resources when we are unable to contact our sponsors. We can telephone/text other members to de-escalate and get help processing triggers. Use the other tools of VA on our own or with another VA member. We can read the VA book or website literature and pamphlets to find answers for almost any problem troubling us at the moment. We can ask for help on the supportive chat groups. Many VA sponsors and sponsees set a weekly meeting time and text or talk in between as availability allows. Some sponsors ask for daily phone check-ins for a new sponsee until they can get a handle on the VA program.

May a newcomer have more than one sponsor?

Many feel it is best for a newcomer to have only one sponsor. Choosing one sponsor helps to avoid the precarious practice of a newcomer going from sponsor to sponsor seeking the advice they want to hear. We have found it helpful for a sponsor to suggest that a sponsee have a phone list of other VA members they can call and to practice calling them on a daily basis.

What about a Temporary Sponsor?

When a newcomer is having trouble finding a sponsor, they might ask someone to be a temporary sponsor. Someone who can temporarily guide the newcomer through the recovery process, introduce them to VA meetings with solid recovery, and/or listen to their violence story and work Step One. Experienced members of VA who might not have the time commitment or don't consider themselves ready to be a full time sponsor can use being a temporary sponsor as a way to "try it out" and gain the experience needed to become a full time sponsor.

May a newcomer change sponsors?

We are always free to select another sponsor with whom we feel more comfortable, particularly if we believe this member will be more helpful to our growth in VA. We suggest that a sponsor and/or sponsee confer with other VAs prior to making a decision to change sponsors to avoid making rash/quick decisions that can have negative effects on one's recovery.

What is a Co-Sponsor?

When VAs have worked through the 12 Steps of VA in at least one role on the Drama Triangle (Victim, Persecutor or Rescuer) they may decide to co-sponsor each other. This can work if each is experienced enough to understand the VA program of recovery and both are willing to hold the other accountable. Especially in continuing to work the 12 Steps of VA on each of the 3 roles on the Drama Triangle.

If a newcomer has received a thorough course of treatment and indoctrination in a program outside VA, will a sponsor still be needed in VA? Is a special approach needed?

Many come to VA after or while attending an anger management, domestic violence, or another 12 Step program. These newcomers may have some recovery under their belt, but are inexperienced with working the 12 Steps of Violence Anonymous.

This newcomer may have learned many facts about sources of violence and some of the Tools of VA while still struggling with relational drama and triggers. Our slogan “It’s not ‘WHAT we do’ it’s the ‘WAY we do it.’” applies here. Without guidance on how we recover in VA, the “WAY” we use the tools may not be as effective as it will be with time and sponsorship in the VA program.

Sponsorship is recommended for anyone as soon as possible to understand how we work the VA Steps. For example in Step 2 we begin Processing Triggers, which is essential in recovering from trauma and addiction. Those who learn how to process triggers daily recover much faster than those who don’t and having a Sponsor to guide us through the process is invaluable. The sponsor’s personal experience can also support the newcomer in applying VA principles to everyday life.

Is it ever too late to get a sponsor?

No. A VA who has been in — or “around” the Fellowship for many years often finds that getting a good sponsor, talking frankly, and listening can make the whole program open up as it never did before. Most VAs feel that sponsorship is a vital part of their ongoing growth and progress in recovery, including persons who have long term sobriety. Sponsorship can be the answer for the person who has been able to achieve only interludes of sobriety or who has attended meetings casually and has not really taken the First Step. For such a person, a sponsor with a firm grounding of sobriety in VA can make all the difference. Even if we have many years of VA meetings behind us, we can often benefit by asking a VA friend to be our sponsor. We may have been feeling discontentment or real emotional pain because we forgot that the VA program offers a whole new way of life, not just freedom from acting out. With a sponsor’s help, we can use the program to the fullest, change our attitudes, and, in the process, come to enjoy our lives more fully.

For the person wanting to be a sponsor

How does sponsorship help the sponsor?

Sponsorship strengthens the older member's sobriety. The act of sharing sobriety makes it easier for a member to live without drama. By helping others, VAs find that they help themselves. Sponsorship also offers the satisfaction that comes from getting outside ourselves or beyond our self-centered focus. In a very real sense, it fulfills the human need to help others through rough spots.

Can any member be a sponsor?

There is no exclusive club of sponsors in VA. Any member can help the newcomer learn to cope with life without resorting to power or control to get their needs met. Some general guidelines for sponsorship are:

1. A sponsor has 1 year or more consistently attending VA meetings.
2. Has worked through at least Step 5.
3. The sponsor is successfully neutralizing their trauma and limiting beliefs by processing triggers on a regular basis.
4. They use the VA Tools successfully.

In most instances, VA custom does suggest one limitation: sponsorship should be avoided whenever a romantic entanglement might arise between sponsor and sponsee. We VA members, no matter how long we have been sober, remain thoroughly human, subject to emotions that might divert us from "our primary purpose."

When is a member ready for sponsorship responsibility?

Our primary purpose is to carry the message of VA to those who have been affected by violent behavior. VA members who have actually worked the Steps of VA as a way to attain sobriety are often in the best position to share their experience, strength and hope. The most successful sponsors seem to be members who have been in VA long enough to have a good understanding of the VA program outlined in the Twelve Steps. Many of us think it wise to seek advice from our own sponsors about when we may be ready to take on the responsibility of sponsoring another violence addict. The member who has been sober for months or years is usually — but not always — able to work more effectively with newcomers than the members whose experience is limited to only a few weeks or days. Thus, length of sobriety is a factor, but not the only factor, in successful sponsorship. Just as importantly, the sponsor should have

capacity for understanding, patience, and the willingness to devote time and effort to new members.

What does a sponsor do and not do?

- A sponsor does everything possible, within the limits of personal experience, knowledge and self-care, to help the newcomer get sober and stay sober through the VA program.
- Helps a sponsee work the steps.
- Helps a sponsee identify when they might be triggered.
- Helps a sponsee find handles and process triggers. Processing triggers is introduced in Step 2, and is fundamental in working Steps 2 through 12.
- Helps develop and use a Safety Plan.
- Encourages a sponsee to reach out for help and support when triggered.
- Shows by present example and violent history what VA has meant in the sponsor's life.
- Encourages and helps the newcomer to attend a variety of VA meetings — to get a number of viewpoints and interpretations of the VA program.
- Suggests keeping an open mind about VA if the newcomer isn't sure at first whether he or she is addicted to violence.
- Introduces the newcomer to other members.
- Sees that the newcomer is aware of VA literature, in particular the 12 Step Book, "And So We Begin", Processing Triggers Pamphlet, Tools of VA, Healthy Boundary Styles, Newcomers Pamphlet, Definition of Sobriety, Signs of Victimhood, Drama Triangle Roles and other suitable literature.
- Recognises that problems are usually the result of being triggered and helps the sponsee process their trigger and get off of the Drama Triangle.
- Goes over the meaning of the Twelve Steps, and emphasizes their importance.
- Urges the newcomer to join in group activities as soon as possible.
- Impresses upon the newcomer the importance of all our Traditions.
- Emphasizes the relevance and spiritual value of anonymity, both on a person-to-person basis, as well as at the public level, including social media. (For more information see the pamphlet, "Understanding Anonymity.")
- Tries to give the newcomer some picture of the scope of VA, beyond the group, and directs attention to VA literature.
- Quickly admits, "I don't know" when that is the case, and helps the newcomer find a good source of information.
- The sponsor encourages the newcomer to work with other violence addicts as soon as possible, and sometimes begins by taking the newcomer along to Newcomers Meetings or on Twelfth Step calls.
- Needs to be aware of their own triggers so that they are not giving advice while triggered.
- Refrains from taking the newcomer's inventory except when asked.
- Will express discomfort with a newcomer's violent speech, attitudes, and actions, if it arises.

- Never tries to impose personal views on the newcomer. A good sponsor who is an atheist does not try to persuade a religious newcomer to abandon faith, nor does a religious sponsor argue theological matters with an agnostic newcomer.
- Does not pretend to know all the answers, and does not keep up a pretense of being right all of the time.
- A VA sponsor does not offer professional services such as those provided by counselors, the legal, medical or social work communities, but may sometimes help the newcomer to access professional help if assistance outside the scope of VA is needed.
- Stresses the importance of VA being a safe place for all members.
- The sponsor underscores the fact that it is the VA recovery program — not the sponsor's personality or position — that is important. Thus, the newcomer learns to rely on the VA program, not on the sponsor.
- A sponsor well-grounded in the VA program will not be offended if the newcomer goes to other VA members for additional guidance or even decides to change sponsors. A sponsor will in fact encourage the newcomer to connect with other VAs on a regular basis.
- Is there any one best way of sponsoring a newcomer? The answer is no. All members are free to approach sponsorship as their own individual experiences and personalities may suggest. Some sponsors adopt a more or less brusque, "Take it or leave it" approach in dealing with newcomers. Others exhibit extreme patience and great personal interest in the people they sponsor. Still others are somewhat casual, content to let the new person take the initiative in asking questions or seeking help in special situations. Each approach is sometimes successful and sometimes fails. The sponsor has to decide which to try in a particular case. The experienced sponsor recognizes the importance of flexibility in working with newcomers, does not rely on a single approach, and may try a number of different approaches with the same person.

Tips that a sponsor can use to be more effective

- When a sponsor is aware that a sponsee is triggered the sponsor might say things like "Do you think you might be triggered about that?" which allows the sponsee to think about it, rather than, "You are so triggered!" which can put them on the defensive.
- When a sponsor is getting triggered by an interaction with a sponsee they could admit it and let the sponsee know that they are pausing the conversation to process their own trigger and they will resume the conversation later when neutral.
- Listening and speaking with Non-Violent Communication is a good rule of thumb on how to communicate with a sponsee.
- Praying with a sponsee can be a great way to help them get centered and de-escalate.
- Figure out, in advance, the time you have available for sponsorship. Some sponsors block out 30 to 60 min time slots once a week. Others ask sponsees to call every day in early sobriety. Some sponsors offer group calls. Figure out what works for your schedule and needs as a sponsor, to avoid falling into rescuing. Some sponsors need to stretch to be less self-centered and more of service. Others need to be careful not to give time

away that they need for themselves. If your availability doesn't match with a potential sponsee, then it may not be a good fit.

- Decide in advance what you expect from a sponsee. For example, a sponsor may suggest attending a minimum of 4 meetings per week, or 90 meetings in 90 days. A sponsee may be expected to complete reading and writing assignments in between calls. Clarity at the outset will help in having a successful relationship.
- Offer to sponsor a newcomer, rather than waiting to be asked. Furthermore, you can suggest taking someone through Steps 1-3 or work out a trial period for an initial few months to see how it goes. We call this Temporary Sponsorship. This can be useful when a sponsee is hesitant to get started working the Steps.

How can a sponsor explain the VA program?

Sponsors will want to explain VA in the manner that each finds most natural and most likely to be clear to the newcomer at hand. Some sponsors find that reminding the newcomer of the First Step — that they are powerless over violence and that their lives had become unmanageable — is key to a successful recovery. Many sponsors make it a point to emphasize that together they can do what they could not do alone. These sponsors remind the newcomer that VA offers a practical program, and that it has already helped people all over the world. They suggest the need for open-mindedness in facing violence addiction as a personal problem, and they underscore the fact that it is up to the newcomer alone to decide whether he or she is addicted to violence and whether VA can help.

Nearly all members who work with newcomers look upon the VA program in terms of their own experience. They tell the new person that no one speaks for VA and that every member is perfectly free to arrive at an individual understanding of the program. Some sponsors talk about the program in a more spiritual way than others do. But nearly all call attention to the source of strength to be found in “a Power greater than violence.” Again, the sponsor points out, it is up to the newcomer to determine what that VA phrase means. It expresses an idea that people of many faiths — or of no particular faith — can and do accept with complete harmony.

Many sponsors discuss the significance of anonymity at a personal level and public level early on.

Anonymity at a personal level provides protection for all members from the identification as violence addicts, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers. At the public level of press, radio, films, and other media technologies, such as the internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting the brakes on those who might otherwise exploit their VA affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain. Anonymity also helps avert reactions and misunderstandings about the VA name by those outside of VA. The sponsor is quick to point out the benefits of anonymity at this public level. Sponsors may provide examples from their own experience of maintaining public anonymity.

Should a sponsor recommend mental health care or other treatment?

It is important to remember that a sponsor is not serving as a doctor or a mental health professional. A VA oldtimer offers this reminder: other professional care given to a newcomer “does not in any way lessen the responsibility of the VA member to carry the message in the best way possible, and to furnish good sponsorship. It is not good VA practice to simply dump a violence addict into the lap of others because we do not have enough time, or because the violence addict is troublesome or demanding. Most of us recall with gratitude the enduring patience and great kindness older members showed us when we were new ourselves.”

How can a sponsor work with a sponsee's family?

When a family member is asking you for help, the sponsor can explain the VA program and point out that most members have found it easier to live a life without conflict and drama, when their relatives took an interest in VA, became familiar with VA literature, and attended open meetings.

In general, the sponsor can help the sponsee's family give the newcomer every chance to make good in VA and can urge the family not to expect too much, too soon, from the recovering person. In some cases, family relationships have slipped seriously as a result of the sponsee's behavior while acting out violence. The sponsor should not act like a professional counselor in such situations. The sponsor will also want the family to know that they are welcome to attend VA meetings for themselves to help heal from the violent relationship or situation.

Should a sponsor lend money to a newcomer?

This is, of course, a matter of individual judgment and decision. Involved in it is the basic fact that VA has a single purpose: to help addicts with their violence issues. VA is not a philanthropic or job-finding society. Money, or the lack of it, has never been a key factor in an individual's ability to get sober in VA. The sponsor who lends money to a newcomer does so at risk and may even be slowing down the new person's progress toward sobriety. The newcomer who turns to VA for money, clothes, or assurance of employment is coming to the wrong place for the wrong thing. VA has something far more important to offer: sobriety. Professional agencies can furnish other kinds of help if any are needed. But many VAs when sober can solve their own domestic, vocational, or legal problems.

Should a sponsor intercede with an employer?

By the time a violence addict turns to VA, they may already have lost a job or be in danger of losing one. If there is a job, it may involve working for an employer who is uninformed about

violence and knows little or nothing of VA. Whether or not a sponsor should intercede to preserve another VA's job depends upon the individual circumstances of each case. A surprising number of employers, anxious to restore competent employees to maximum efficiency, welcome the news that a worker has turned to VA, and are interested in knowing more about the recovery program.

Can a sponsor be too firm?

If a sponsor senses they're using power and control over a sponsee, working Steps 1-5 and doing trigger processing is suggested.

Some sponsors believe in being fairly blunt with a newcomer. They describe the VA program as they understand it. They explain what VA has meant to them. They point out that there is no known cure for violence addiction, but that it can be arrested. Having done these things, they leave the next move up to the newcomer. If the still-active or willful person does not reach a decision immediately to join VA, this sponsor believes in letting them go. The VA program is based on certain tested principles, which a newcomer may disregard at their own peril. Firm boundaries in sponsorship emphasizes these tested principals and usually works well in convincing the newcomer. Most VAs, however, recognize that firmness overdone can upset a newcomer. It should be tempered with empathy and understanding.

Can a sponsor be overprotective?

In their enthusiasm to help a newcomer achieve sobriety, some sponsors may tend to be overprotective. They worry unduly about the persons they sponsor and tend to smother them with attention. In doing so, they may run the risk of having a newcomer depend on an individual member, rather than on the VA program. The most effective sponsors recognize that people who join VA must eventually stand on their own feet and make their own decisions — and that there is a difference between helping people to their feet and insisting on holding them up thereafter. Another danger of overprotectiveness is that it is a form of rescuing and will most likely annoy the newcomer to the point of resenting the attempts to “help” — we want to minimize newcomers expressing their resentment by turning away from VA.

Can a sponsor be too casual?

Some sponsors prefer to adopt a casual attitude toward newcomers with whom they work. For example, they are perfectly willing to spend time with the new member who asks for it, but rarely take the time or trouble to call between meetings or help the newcomer get to meetings. Some newcomers actually flourish best left pretty much on their own. But there may be some danger in this approach: a timid or reserved newcomer may conclude that the group and the individual

sponsor are not interested in helping. Many present members report that they did not make a firm decision to adopt the VA program until months or years after their first contact with VA, simply because they were allowed to drift away from the group. Groups can avoid this by establishing a program for following up with newcomers during a period of weeks or months after an initial approach is made to the group.

How can a sponsor handle an overly dependent newcomer?

In the first days of VA sobriety, a newcomer is sometimes so bewildered and frightened — or so mentally fuzzy and physically weak — that they need to be encouraged to attend meetings and perhaps helped in making personal decisions. Such utter dependence on the sponsor, when carried past the earliest stages of recovery, often becomes damaging to both parties. It has already been pointed out that we stay sober through reliance on the VA program, not on any one member, so the newcomer's chances in this situation may not be very good. The sponsor may either feel harried by constant, unreasonable demands, or feel flattered and let the ego build up dangerously.

How can this dilemma be solved without leaving the newcomer disheartened?

Many VAs, when first asked to sponsor, will have met with the newcomer and reviewed this pamphlet in an effort to avoid pitfalls. Most likely, the sponsor and newcomer will have discussed their commitments and agreed-upon expectations early in the relationship. The sponsor will also have encouraged the newcomer to talk to other VA members with longer-term sobriety. Now might be the time for a heartfelt talk in which the sponsor again explains the importance of relying on the entire VA program, as well as their concern regarding the overdependence of the newcomer. If this conversation fails to provide a solution, the sponsor may offer to remain as a temporary sponsor until the newcomer can find a sponsor they feel more comfortable with.

How can a sponsor work with a newcomer who rejects help?

In such cases, there is little a sponsor can do except assure the newcomer of willingness to help, when and if needed. Occasionally, it may be wise to introduce the newcomer to a VA member who shares more of the newcomer's background and interests. Sponsorship is a flexible venture, and good sponsors are themselves flexible in working with new people. It is just as much a mistake to thrust unwanted help upon (rescuing) a newcomer as it is to refuse help when a newcomer asks for it.

When newcomers resist “the spiritual side” of the program, what can sponsors do?

First of all, we can relax and remember that sponsorship does not mean forcing any specific interpretation of VA upon newcomers. Most men and women who have been in VA for more than a few months recognize that its program is based on spiritual principles. At the same time, they appreciate that Violence Addicts have been able to achieve and maintain sobriety without any belief in a personal Higher Power. Perhaps the sponsor might point out the distinction between the words “spiritual” and “religious.” As our Preamble says, VA is not allied with any ideology or religion, and no specific belief is required for membership — only “a desire to stop participating in the cycle of violence.” On the other hand, the help offered by our program is certainly neither material nor physical; we do not offer money or medicine — only ideas and the VA love of one VA for another. In this sense, the entire program, rather than just a “side” of it, may be called “spiritual,” and almost any newcomer can appreciate a concept so broadly defined.

How should a sponsor deal with slips?

It can be most discouraging to work with a newcomer who gets sober for a period, then has a relapse, or slip, and starts engaging in violence again. This can be a delicate, difficult time for both the sponsor and the newcomer. The sponsor may be tempted to consider the newcomer ungrateful or even to give up. Here, we sponsors need to look carefully into our own attitudes, to steer a middle course between harsh criticism that would only build up the newcomer’s remorse, and maudlin sympathizing that would add to self-pity. The newcomer, of course, may be even more discouraged and bewildered, and may find it extremely difficult to return to the sponsor and the group for a fresh start. (For this reason, many sponsors believe it important to take the initiative and call the newcomer.) In order to make the return truly a new beginning, it may be wise at this point for a sponsor to guide the newcomer back to the simplicity of the First and Second Step in the VA step book, [And So We Begin](#). Later, the newcomer may want to check the kind of thinking that possibly led to the slip, in order to guard against its recurrence. Here, the sponsor’s role depends completely on the two people involved. If the sponsor was aware of the danger signals beforehand, one newcomer may say, “If only you had told me!” but another may rebel at the idea of having been “watched.” Regarded realistically, the slip can become a learning experience for both the sponsee and the sponsor. For the sponsor, it may serve as a push toward humility, a reminder that one person cannot keep another person sober and that the Twelfth Step says, “...we tried to carry this message...” Most good sponsors emphasize that people who have slipped continue to be welcome in VA. Successful sponsorship activity depends to a large degree on the understanding and love that the individual and group offer to a newcomer who may have one or more slips despite sincere efforts to achieve VA sobriety. See [Definition of VA Sobriety](#) for clarification of a slip.

Can a member sponsor more than one newcomer simultaneously?

VA members differ in their enthusiasm for sponsorship work, in their ability to handle it effectively, and in the time they can give. Members who are willing and able to sponsor several newcomers simultaneously should certainly not be discouraged. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that sponsorship is, in a sense, a privilege to be shared by as many members as possible and an activity that helps all members to strengthen their sobriety. Further, members who do too much sponsorship work may get exaggerated ideas about their abilities, may even risk their own sobriety. As in so many phases of VA, common sense is the best guide.

For groups planning sponsorship activity

How does sponsorship help a group? How can a group or meeting encourage sponsorship?

The primary purpose of an VA group is to carry the message of the recovery program to violence addicts who want and ask for help. Group meetings are one way of doing this. Sponsorship is another.

Sponsorship can be broadened to include working with VAs in nearby institutions and through correspondence with isolated Members.

Active sponsorship programs within a group remind all members of the group's primary purpose. They serve to unite a group, keep it mindful of First Things First. Sponsorship can also help a group to create a welcoming and secure environment. Safety is an issue affecting all members, and it is important for groups to remain accessible to all who are seeking recovery. Sponsorship can help keep the group focused on the common welfare.

What procedures can a group set up to sponsor new members?

Carefully planned sponsorship activity within a group is often likely to produce better results than sponsorship left to chance. A typical pattern of planned sponsorship within a local group might include the following:

- Meetings can elect a Newcomer Greeter and/or ask experienced members to stay after the meeting to answer newcomer questions and introduce them around. These experienced members might offer to sponsor, recommend sponsors to newcomers and make sure newcomers know about newcomer meetings. In large groups, people on a hospitality committee may identify themselves for the benefit of the newcomer. In smaller

groups, the secretary may, during the announcements, simply ask newcomers to come up and make themselves known after the meeting, so they may be introduced to other members.

- A regular committee on sponsorship or a Twelfth Step committee, with members rotating frequently. If there is an intergroup or central office that keeps a list of local groups and the members available for Twelfth Step calls, such a committee may check to see whether the group has enough of its members on the office list to fulfill its responsibility.
- Regular beginners meetings (also called newcomers meetings) — particularly in larger communities where there are many newcomers. [A Guide for Leading Beginners Meetings](#) is available from A.A. (VA version coming...)
- Another suggested announcement. “If any person here does not have a sponsor and wants one, please see the secretary, who will arrange a temporary sponsor.” Where this practice is followed at each meeting, members say, it reminds the group of the value of sponsoring and being sponsored.
- Closed-meeting discussions of sponsorship problems and opportunities. Some groups schedule meetings especially for this purpose.
- For In-Person Meetings a Table display of Conference-approved VA literature on recovery (including this pamphlet). For Online Meetings refer the newcomers to the [“Resources”](#) Page on the VA Website.
- Study of Step 12 in the VA Step Book, [And So We Begin](#).
- Regular procedure (carried out by the secretary or the sponsorship committee) for welcoming newcomers who have just left institutions, treatment centers, or halfway houses. For instance, the secretary may receive word from the secretary of a prison group that a newly released person is about to attend a meeting, and the “outside” group is then alerted to the arrival of this newcomer. If it is feasible, a member of the group may even offer to meet the person immediately upon release.

How may “outside” VA groups help groups and members in institutions?

A.A. Fully covers this in their pamphlets. Use them as a guide.

This subject is fully covered in the pamphlets “AA in Correctional Facilities” and “AA in Treatment Settings.” Also see Guidelines on Corrections Committees and Guidelines on Treatment Facilities Committees, Treatment Facilities Workbook and Corrections Workbook, all available from AA G.S.O. Service Sponsorship “...AA service is anything that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a

cup of coffee, and to AA's General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service." —

Service Sponsors

In cases where meetings, districts and regions of VA have strong service, designating a Service Sponsor to help people find service positions and carry the message of VA can be helpful. AA describes a Service Sponsor in [The AA Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service](#).

Sponsorship in VA is basically the same, whether helping another individual's recovery or service to a group. It can be defined as one violence addict who has made some progress in recovery and/or performance in service, sharing this experience with another violence addict who is just starting the journey.

Both types of service spring from the spiritual aspects of the program. Individuals may feel that they have more to offer in one area than in another. It is the Service Sponsor's responsibility to present the various aspects of service: setting up a meeting; working on committees; participating in conferences, etc.

In this matter it is important for the Service Sponsor to help individuals understand the distinction between serving the needs of the Fellowship and meeting the personal needs of another group member. A Service Sponsor is usually someone who is knowledgeable in VA history and has a strong background in the service structure. The VA member is introduced to a new language: G.S.R., Fellowship Wide Group Conscious, V.A. World Service, area assembly, minority opinion. They will become familiar with the Traditions, Concepts and Warranties, as well as The AA Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service, And So We Begin and other VA literature. The Service Sponsor begins by encouraging the member to become active in their home group — coffee, literature, cleanup, attending 26 business or intergroup meetings, etc. The Service Sponsor should keep in mind that all members will not have the desire or qualifications to move beyond certain levels and, thus, the Service Sponsor might help find tasks appropriate to individuals' skills and interests. Whatever level of service one performs, all are toward the same end — sharing the overall responsibilities of Violence Anonymous.

Eventually, the Service Sponsor encourages the individual member interested in this form of service to attend district meetings and to read about the history and structure of Violence Anonymous. At this point, the individual beginning this work should begin to understand the responsibilities of service work, as well as feel the satisfaction of yet another form of Twelfth Step work. Such individuals should be encouraged to take an active part in district activities and consider being elected to alternate positions in the district so as to learn about the responsibilities of various jobs in the service structure.

During this process it is important for the individual to continue to learn about the Three Legacies — Recovery, Unity and Service, and to understand that the principle of rotation not

only allows them to move on in service, but also gives newer members the privilege of serving. Rotation also allows them to understand that no one should hold on to a position of trust long enough to feel a proprietary interest and thereby discourage newcomers from service. Co-founder of AA Dr. Bob said, "I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons: 1. Sense of duty. 2. It is a pleasure. 3. Because in doing so I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me. 4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."

The basis of all sponsorship is to lead by example. Service Sponsors can impart to their sponsees the pleasure of involvement in the work of Violence Anonymous. This is best done by stressing the spiritual nature of service work and by pointing out the usefulness of simple footwork and faith. Now, through knowledge and experience, the newer member is aware that service is our most important product after sobriety. With this knowledge, the individual is able to share their vision with others and ensure the future of Violence Anonymous.

Summary

Most present members of Violence Anonymous owe their sobriety to the fact that someone else took a special interest in them and was willing to share a great gift with them. Sponsorship is merely another way of describing the continuing special interest of a seasoned member that can mean so much to a newcomer turning to VA for help. Individuals and groups cannot afford to lose sight of the importance of sponsorship, the importance of taking a special interest in a struggling violence addict who wants to stop acting violently. Experience shows clearly that the members getting the most out of the VA program, and the groups doing the best job of carrying the VA message to still suffering addicts, are those for whom sponsorship is too important to be left to chance. These members and groups consider sponsorship responsibilities welcome and accepted opportunities to enrich their personal VA experience and to deepen the satisfaction that comes from working with others.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF VIOLENCE ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over violence, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought, through prayer and meditation, to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF VIOLENCE ANONYMOUS

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

VA PUBLICATIONS

<https://violenceanonymous.org/>