

Sponsorship – The Tough Questions

Trust and Readiness

Coming from family backgrounds where our True Self may not have been safe,

- How do we trust the healing process today?
- How do we trust ourselves to show up for ‘good enough’ recovery?
- This material can be very vulnerable, how safe is it to share it with others?
- How can we trust that we won’t act out from the pain of the past and harm others who work with us?
- In close relationships how do we learn the difference between feeling triggered and being unsafe?

These are some of the tough questions we ask in recovery.

How do we come to trust ourselves?

We come to trust a developing Inner Loving Parent to hold it down in the journey of freedom from the debilitating consequences of family dysfunction. **We trust each adult among us to decide their own course of recovery without judgment.** It can be scary to remember the difficult times from the past, especially when they may have been overshadowed by our inability to do much about it, even to the point of blaming ourselves because no one said otherwise. There is a saying, “If we can survive our childhoods (sometimes alone), **we can survive remembering and healing with the help of trusted others.**” For those of us who have been haunted by dark secrets from the past, **having a safe space in recovery is essential.**

How do we avoid causing harm to others?

As children we were betrayed by those we needed to trust. The sickness of family dysfunction taught us to hurt ourselves and others. Now, in recovery, we attain a new level of safety and wholeness in the unity of the fellowship (Tradition 1). We must be vigilant about propagating the hurts from childhood. The shame and blame are carryovers from the past. In places of pain we may act out and hurt others (Other Laundry List). How can we be mindful of our impact on other Fellow Travelers? We may lash out when we get triggered and blame others for not caring enough or being on our side. We have come to value the support we have found in recovery and learn to trust in ourselves and a Higher Power. In the path of emotional awareness and sobriety we need to **trust those who journey with us and trust ourselves to be gentle with them.**

Trusting yourself

- What helps you feel safe?
 - In your own heart?
 - In meetings?
 - In remembering uncomfortable feelings?

We believe in you and your ability to thrive in your own way.

- What helps you build confidence in yourself as a loving adult for your inner child?
- Have you noticed changes in yourself since coming to meetings?

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Being sensitive to yourself

- Can you commit to being gentle with yourself through the process?
- Can you accept and love yourself when you get triggered emotionally?
- If needed, what are ways you can be more gentle with your Inner Child, helping to remove the inner blame?
- Can you as the Inner Loving Parent pledge to hold it down for your Inner Child? What help do you need to do this?

We come to trust a new-found strength within.

- What ways have you seen your own inner strength developing?
- Have there been times when you were surprised at how strong you are becoming?

Being gentle with others

As we come out of denial about how we were hurt and neglected, our Fellow Travelers become precious. Still the pain from the past can overwhelm us. In recovery we learn to stop the cycle of trauma while still embracing our humanity.

- How can you recognize and care for yourself when you get triggered?
- How can you help your inner child make sense of the feelings and people around you?
- Can you give yourself permission to step back from emotionally reactive situations?
- When things happen would it be okay if no one were to blame?
- Can you commit to honoring the recovery of others and seeing them as 'good enough'?
- Can you commit to being safe with others who are vulnerable?

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What is the value of having a sponsor?

Since the beginning sponsorship has been a hallmark of 12 step recovery programs. It has been characterized as essential for long term recovery. There is a saying, “If you want to feel better, go to meetings. If you want to get better, work the steps with a sponsor.”

Sponsorship is an option in recovery; take it if you like it and leave it if you do not. Many of us have come to embrace the richness of sponsorship and the power of the bonds between sponsor and sponsee. Like other positions of service, we have been delighted at how we can both help ourselves and have room to make even a small difference for someone else. We come to believe that a Higher Power is part of this abundance and contrasts with the scarcity from when we were children.

With the deeply sensitive nature of our ACA work **we ask for safety and compassion** rather than challenge or drama. We **ask for trusted witnesses to the true nature of our childhood experiences** rather than judgment, analysis or fixing advice. We understand that **we might need counseling and other support forums**. Each person has their own Higher Power and we respect them in making their own choices. We don't have to ignore feelings or make them go away. We don't need rescue. We come to understand that **compassionate presence is enough** and we let go of trying to 'save' each other. We allow each person the gift of agency in their own healing journey. We might not like owning our recovery and wish someone else would do something about it. But in time we come to find no other way but to step up ourselves, however painful.

We have amazing literature, meetings and workshops in ACA; what role does sponsorship play?

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Being a Sponsee

- What are your feelings about sponsorship? Can you be okay with how you feel about it?
- If new, would you be open to trying sponsorship?
- What things would you need from a sponsor?
- What are you willing to give?
- What things are important for a sponsor to know about you?

Being a Sponsor

If you have worked with a sponsor, the time will come when you might consider being a sponsor yourself. The vulnerability that recovery brings can trigger the Other Laundry List Traits. With love, we check ourselves.

- How will you know if and when you are ready to help another as a sponsor?
- Can you trust yourself to be a “good enough” sponsor?
- Could you really let go of trying to fix them?
- Can you trust that your sponsee will have their own Higher Power and it is not you?
- Are you willing to set limits with your sponsee for your own self care?

We find that the work in sponsorship can trigger painful feelings that may not always be clear. We might project these feelings onto the person at hand.

- Can you be mindful of the ways you might be reacting to your childhood when irritated with a sponsee?
- Can you let go of control and allow them their own path however painful it may seem?
- Can you release them from a reputation of being your sponsee or expectations about your image?
- Can you release sponsees from taking care of your needs to be a sponsor and allow them the freedom of their own recovery?
- How can you not take personally what sponsees decide for themselves, especially when it differs from your own best ideas?
- Can you realize that just because you do not understand someone, does not mean they are confused?