

D.A. HOW

Sponsor/Sponsee Suggestions

As developed for members who attend D.A. HOW Meetings

Last Updated 6/29/2024

Introduction

D.A. HOW provides a very structured approach to recovery in Debtors Anonymous. For many of us, the HOW concept has worked where a more traditional “take what you like and leave the rest” approach did not. “If you want what we have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it” then you are ready to work the D.A. HOW concept. “We thought we could find an easier, softer way, but we could not... Many of us tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely... Half measures availed us nothing.” – © *Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Edition, pages 58-59, reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.*

D.A. HOW is D.A. It is just one approach to working the D.A. program. The HOW concept lays out very specific ways of using each of the tools of D.A. In particular, D.A. HOW centers around the sponsor/sponsee relationship. Our sponsors are not our Higher Power, but they are our guides on the journey, sharing to the best of their ability the discipline and structure of the HOW concept.

Purpose Statement

This document represents the collected work of D.A. HOW members over time. In the years since D.A. HOW’s founding (2004) there have been a lot of questions raised about how to pass along the program in a way that is both compassionately loving and firmly rooted in the structure and discipline we have come to rely on for our continued abstinence. Therefore we have pulled together what we hope will be a helpful tool for all those who have chosen to follow the HOW concept in working the D.A. program.

We have compiled previous Sponsor/Sponsee Guidelines documents and the combined experience, strength and hope of multiple D.A. HOW sponsors. It is our hope that these guidelines will help the newcomer to understand why we do what we do in D.A. HOW and provide clarity of structure and purpose. We recognize that, as stated in the Second Tradition, “for our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.” We also recognize that we can only pass along the program as it has been passed along to us. While the following guidelines are generally accepted, individual sponsors may have a slightly different understanding of how to best use a particular tool. Therefore we strongly encourage the newcomer to discuss these guidelines with his or her individual sponsor and invite their Higher Power into that discussion to get clarity about how to get the most out of the sponsor/sponsee relationship.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

"Many of us exclaimed, ‘What an order! I can't go through with it.’ Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."

– (© *Alcoholics Anonymous 4th Edition, page 60, reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.*)

Guidelines

These are the guidelines followed by those of us working the D.A. HOW program. We have found that following these daily disciplines is what allows us to recover from compulsive debting and spending one day at a time with the help of our Higher Power. Each of these guidelines is explained in more detail following this list.

1. Daily Sponsor Call

- a. We call our sponsor(s) at the agreed-upon time. Every day.
- b. We are prepared in advance for our call.
- c. Our call lasts no more than 15 minutes.
- d. Our call begins with a prayer. Some sponsors also end calls with a prayer.

2. Daily Spending Plan

- a. We all have a spending plan.
- b. We commit anticipated amounts by category.
- c. We do not spend money we have not committed.
- d. We do not change our committed spending without contacting a sponsor.

3. Daily Telephone Calls

- a. We make or receive at least one program-related call a day.

4. Daily Reading and Writing Assignments

- a. We set aside time to do our reading and writing each day.
- b. We read the required assignment and write for approximately 15 minutes on the question or topic.

5. Weekly Meetings

- a. We attend at least one D.A. meeting a week, preferably a D.A. HOW meeting.
- b. We commit to a "home meeting," *when possible*, and attend that meeting regularly.

6. Anonymity

- a. We practice anonymity in every area of our program.

7. Service

- a. Giving service is a critical part of our program.
- b. We do this because we know we cannot keep what we have received unless we give it away.

About Slips

In D.A. HOW we commit ourselves to black and white abstinence from compulsive debting and spending. The last section of this document explains in detail what constitutes a slip in this program.

Explanation of Guidelines

1. Daily Sponsor Call

- a. We call our sponsor(s) at the agreed-upon time. Every day.
 - i. Calling on time prevents vagueness and is a spiritual act.
 - ii. This is not about perfection. This is an act of *surrender*.
As addicts, “we... are undisciplined” (Alcoholics Anonymous, page 88). D.A. HOW teaches us discipline.
- b. We are prepared in advance for our call.
 - i. Yesterday’s spending is totaled, written down, and ready to report.
 - ii. Today’s spending is written down and ready to report.
 - iii. Our writing assignment is complete, and we have spent adequate time on it.
- c. Our call lasts no more than 15 minutes.
 - i. We commit our numbers and read our assignment first.
 - ii. If time remains, we can discuss other issues.
 - iii. Our sponsor will monitor the time and end the call at 15 minutes. This is not a personal affront. It is an act of setting and adhering to healthy boundaries. Additional time to work out difficult issues can be scheduled with our sponsors, our Pressure Relief Group, and/or worked through on our daily outreach calls.
- d. Our call begins with a prayer. Some sponsors also end calls with a prayer.
 - i. Our sponsor is not our Higher Power. We invite our Higher Power into our daily sponsor call to remember we are not the ones running the show.

2. Daily Spending Plan

- a. We all have a spending plan.
 - i. Our monthly spending plan is developed in cooperation with our Pressure Relief Group (PRG). Without a spending plan and a Pressure Relief Group, we are unable to combat the vagueness that is a part of our disease.
 - ii. When we first come into program, we need to keep our numbers for at least 30 days to have enough information to develop a monthly spending plan. In these early days, we simply do our best with what we have to estimate each day’s anticipated spending.
- b. We commit anticipated amounts by category.
 - i. We are as clear as these examples:
 1. Up to \$25 for groceries
 2. Up to \$50 for gasoline
 3. Up to \$250 for utilities
 4. \$172.84 for personal business (cell phone)
 - ii. We check our spending plan BEFORE making our spending commitments for the day, to ensure we have enough in each category that we commit.
 - iii. We only move money from category to category after discussing it with our sponsor or PRG.
- c. We only spend money we have committed.
 - i. Most sponsors accept a \$5 “buffer” over the committed amount in each category. We get clarity with our own individual sponsors.

- ii. We only spend money in categories we have committed in advance.
- iii. **Spending money without committing it in advance is a slip or a loss of abstinence** (more on this in the last section of this document).

d. We only make changes to our committed spending after contacting a sponsor

- i. Before spending over the \$5 buffer or spending in a category we have not committed we **contact our sponsor**. We work out in advance the acceptable method of contact with our sponsor.
 - 1. For simple changes (“I forgot I need to pick up a few groceries”) it may be acceptable to text or leave a voicemail with a sponsor, listing the committed dollar amount and category.
 - 2. For larger changes (changes over a certain dollar amount, or what might feel like an impulsive purchase of something “on sale”) we may need to reach a live sponsor. If we cannot reach our sponsor, we call until we get another sponsor on the phone.
- ii. If there is a major change to our monthly spending plan, we discuss it in advance and possibly have a Pressure Relief Meeting about it.
 - 1. For example, if we suddenly have a large, unexpected medical expense, we must discuss it with our sponsor and/or PRG before moving money from another category to cover it.
 - 2. We do not keep secrets about money. This leads back to vagueness, isolation, and ultimately, back to our disease.

3. Daily Telephone Calls

a. We make or receive at least one program-related call a day.

- i. This is in addition to our sponsor/sponsee calls, meetings, or Pressure Relief Meetings.
- ii. We call them “outreach calls,” “hook-up calls,” or “program calls.”
- iii. We talk with a live person about our program.
 - 1. We keep calling until we make a live connection.
 - 2. A face-to-face connection with another member, in which we talk about our program, may also count as our daily phone call.
- iv. Some of us find that we are more connected with our program if we make two calls a day.

4. Daily Reading and Writing Assignments

a. We set aside time to do our reading and writing each day.

- i. We plan enough time to be thoughtful and thorough in our writing, and our assignment is complete in time for our sponsor call.

b. We read the required assignment and then write for approximately 15 minutes on the question or topic.

- i. We stop writing after 15 minutes. If we feel that we haven’t had sufficient time to reflect on a topic, we may write for more than one day on a single assignment.
- ii. Even if we don’t understand or relate to the reading, we still write an assignment. We can write about why we don’t understand or relate.
- iii. If we are unclear about our assignment for the following day and cannot reach our sponsor, we read *something* out of the literature and reflect for 15 minutes.
- iv. Everything we share with our sponsors in our writing will be held in respect and confidence, in the spirit of our tradition of Anonymity.

5. Weekly Meetings

a. We attend at least one D.A. meeting a week.

- i. We make it a priority to attend a D.A. HOW meeting unless this is absolutely not possible. Many of us attend multiple meetings.

b. We commit to a “home meeting,” when possible, and attend that meeting regularly.

- i. This gives us opportunities to do service.

- ii. This helps us develop a network of members within the fellowship.

6. Anonymity

- a. We practice anonymity in every area of our program.
 - i. We keep in confidence the names of our sponsors, sponsees, PRG members, those on our meetings, or those in our networks.
 - ii. We refrain from mentioning other members by name. If someone said something we found valuable that we would like to share, we simply say, "I heard on a meeting..." or "Another fellow told me..."
 - iii. If we are having difficulty with another member and need to discuss our issue with our sponsor or on an outreach call, we are careful to leave out any personal details that might identify the other member. We remember the truth that "Any time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, the problem is with us." (AA 12&12, p. 91). We leave the other person out of the discussion.

7. Service

- a. Giving service is a critical part of our program.
- b. We do this because we know we cannot keep what we have received unless we give it away.
 - i. We give service by being sponsored, by sponsoring when eligible, by attending meetings, and being fully present to them, as well as doing readings, timing, and shares on the meetings. We do service by receiving and giving PRM's. We give and receive service with our outreach calls.
 - ii. Some of us may be prone to underserving or overserving. We communicate with our sponsors about our service commitments to learn healthy boundaries and how to both receive and give.

Abstinence Slips and Program Slips

For those of us working the D.A. HOW Concept, it is essential to adhere to these guidelines completely and thoroughly from the very start. We must be willing to go to any lengths to recover. If we are not committed to the D.A. HOW way of life, our sponsor may offer our time slot to someone more committed. This is not to punish or shame anyone, but to acknowledge that the current sponsor/sponsee relationship is not working. (Please read the excerpt from the book Alcoholics Anonymous, page 96, at the end of this document.)

Therefore:

If a sponsee has three slips the sponsor may release the sponsee.

1. The three slips may be any combination of program or abstinence slips.
2. The sponsor may continue to work with the sponsee for a set period of time (usually a week) while that sponsee attempts to find another sponsor.
3. The sponsor may offer assistance to the sponsee by providing a phone list or a list of meetings the sponsee may attend to find another sponsor.

1. A Slip vs. a Mistake

It has often been said in the HOW rooms that "the difference between a mistake and a slip is a phone call."

- a. None of us is perfect. If we realize we have made a mistake in our spending plan (or if we are unsure about *anything* in our program) we call a sponsor as soon as is humanly possible.
- b. Many sponsors go by the rule of intent. If it truly was an honest mistake, a sponsor has the option of *not* calling it a slip. Sponsors must be very careful not to water down the program but must have grace for the fact that we are living life on life's terms.

- c. Mistakes that are a clear result of vagueness, which could have been prevented by following the guidelines of the program more closely, may still be ruled as slips.
- d. Sponsors do not have the right to play God. If a sponsor has any question about whether something is a mistake or a slip, that sponsor will call other sponsors to discuss the issue before deciding how to classify it.

2. Abstinence Slips

- a. Abstinence, in D.A.-HOW, is (a) not incurring unsecured debt and (b) not spending any money without committing it to a sponsor first.
 - i. Unsecured debt is receiving goods or services without paying for them.
 - ii. Examples of unsecured debt include credit cards, payment plans, paying bills late, and other items. If you have any questions about whether something constitutes unsecured debt, you can discuss it with your sponsor and your Pressure Relief Group.
- b. An abstinence slip, or loss of abstinence includes (but may not be limited to) making the decision to:
 - i. Spend more than \$5 above the amount committed in the specific spending category or any amount above committed amount if you don't have more available in that category
 - ii. Spend money in any category that has not been committed
 - iii. Spend money that is not in your spending plan
 - iv. Incur new unsecured debt
 - v. Be late on existing debt payment as set up in your debt payment plan
 - vi. Be late on paying current monthly expenses (rent/mortgage, car payment, electric bill, phone bill, etc.)
 - vii. Overdraft on bank accounts

3. Results of an abstinence slip

- a. For Newcomers in the first 30 D.A.ys of questions
 - i. Begin counting days of abstinence over.
 - ii. Work with sponsor to do writing assignment about the slip.
 - iii. Sponsors may have newcomers return to Question 1.
- b. For Sponsors/Members who have "Stepped Up"
 - i. Become ineligible to sponsor and cannot sponsor again until reaching 30 days of back-to-back abstinence
 - 1. Must release all sponsees.
 - 2. Must complete the "30-day Recommitment" questions (or other assignments as determined by our sponsors).
 - 3. Must step off the "sponsor line" at meetings and are ineligible to lead a meeting or pitch on the program tools during a meeting.
 - 4. Begin counting days of abstinence over.
 - ii. Cannot serve on a PRG until reaching 90 days of back-to-back abstinence
- c. These are not meant to be punitive or shaming.
 - i. For the newcomer who has had a slip, it gives another opportunity to dig deeper into the first three steps to strengthen their recovery.
 - ii. For the sponsor who had had a slip, it gives time to work on their own recovery without pressure. Sponsors cannot give what they do not experience.

4. Program Slips

- a. A program "slip" is not a break in abstinence although continued program slips may signal the likelihood of a future abstinence slip.
- b. A program "slip" includes:
 - i. Sponsee does not call at the assigned time.
 - ii. Sponsee does not have their spending ready to report and commit.
 - iii. Sponsee has not made the one required outreach call.
 - iv. Sponsee has not done the required reading/writing assignment and has it ready to read to the sponsor.
 - v. Sponsee has not attended minimum of one D.A. meeting (phone or live) per week.

An Excerpt from the book "Alcoholics Anonymous," p. 96:

"Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, he may soon become convinced that he cannot recover by himself. To spend too much time on any one situation is to deny some other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy. One of our Fellowship failed entirely with his first half dozen prospects. He often says that if he had continued to work on them, he might have deprived many others, who have since recovered, of their chance."