

GUIDE TO STARTING STEP MEETINGS IN YOUR HOME GROUP

“Working the Steps” is an integral part of Nar-Anon’s 12 Step recovery program. In its simplest form, it is a step-by-step guide to living a more fulfilling, authentic and spiritually oriented life. Living with addiction left most of us alone, struggling and in desperate need of answers. Our personalities changed to a level where we did not trust our words, reactions, actions or thoughts. If we are honest, we find that we have “lost ourselves” and our way in life’s journey. We came to Nar-Anon for answers. One of the most powerful answers is found through “Working the Steps”.

After some time in our Home Group, many find themselves “wanting more”. We have learned a new language and new ways to live – and we want more joy, peace and serenity in our lives. Step work focuses on our individual relationships – with our Higher Power, our inner selves and others.

In general, Step work involves the following:

Steps 1-3 – covers your relationship with your Higher Power

Steps 4-7 – covers your relationship with your inner self

Steps 8-9 – covers your relationship with others; and,

Steps 10-12 – maintaining all these relationships.

The first question is how to work the Steps? The answer is simple: Never alone, never again. When you work the Steps alone – you bring only your own thinking and your own experiences to the process – nothing new is added. The simple wording of the Steps tells us that this is a “we” process – not an “I” process. The Steps were written in the plural form for a reason! Working the steps is also a “seeking process” - seeking a spiritual power greater than ourselves for wisdom and guidance; and, the seeking of experience, strength and hope from others who have walked this path before us.

We have found that Step Meetings have a multiplied benefit – the individual grows and the home group grows! The shares by Steppers have a richness and depth that is inspirational to the newer member. They want more of what you have!

There are several ways to accomplish these meetings:

Some groups take a Step each month – read the Step and share around the room on that Step. The advantage to this approach permits each person time to “share” and time to “listen”. This form permits both the newcomer and the more seasoned member to share their ESH on the particular Step. This also keeps the Steps alive within group meetings.

Some groups use “share partners” – 2 or more people get together outside the regular meeting, take the Nar-Anon 36 – and answer the questions. They may do their homework during the meeting, or bring their completed homework and read/share their answers. Coming together weekly or every other week provides time to work each assignment. In our experience, doing homework before the meeting requires one to concentrate solely on YOUR individual responses with honesty and willingness. When

the share partners come together – take turns to share each answer – minds are opened to other experiences and ways to think.

Some groups designate more formal Step Classes. Once again, these are set up on a different day than the regular group. We have found that after about 3-6 months of meeting attendance, the need to “do more” arises internally. By having a separate day/time for Step Classes, the strength of the home group meetings remains intact. The size of the group starting does not matter – because some will drop off due to personal reasons. Consider closing the meeting to new people somewhere around Step 1 or 2. As people start to share on a deeper more personal level – a unity builds within this group. Building this step group unity provides yet another level of support – as people tend to rely on fellow steppers when they stumble on a question. We are careful to not share “outside literature” during these classes. Sharing outside literature can be done in other ways – after the meetings or through email chains. In the classes, members are merely guided through the process. If a person wants to go further in Step Work, sponsorship provides a one-on-one process to living the Steps in your daily life.

In our experience, Steps 1-3 (Giving Up) takes additional time, so many “new” concepts are introduced, with different ways to think. By the time the class reaches Step 4 (Owning Up), a special relationship has developed between the participants, such that Step 4 is less intimidating to take. It is not unusual for members to drop off at Step 4, for a number of reasons, primarily centered by fear. Addressing those fears openly and honestly, reinforces that we are not alone in facing our inner fears. As always, our members “share” what they choose to share, and this Step is no different from our regular meetings. There are a number of methods of working Step 4, and it is important to keep an open mind to those options for this Step.

With Step 5 – we have suggested that participants write out their answers; then read these answers out loud to their Higher Power (each person alone with their HP); and, then to the class (covering the 3 elements: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human...). Some believe that reading to the class covers admitting to God, as their Higher Power is always present.

Step 6 leads us from the last concept of “owning up” into the concept of Step 7 “making up,” by introducing the spiritual concepts of willingness and humility. This is often the point in our recovery where our new awareness (gained through working the previous steps) has us in a place of desiring to BE different. We want to change the relationships in our lives – both with ourselves and with others. We readily admit that change is hard work (progress not perfection)! With the love and guidance of our Higher Power, and our shared experiences with change, we find a new compassion. We are all struggling as hurt people. There is inherent truth in the phrase “hurt people, hurt people.” If we want the cycle of hurt to stop, it has to begin within us – “let it begin with me.” With our Higher Power’s help, we humbly and deeply realize we want the healing and restoration available from this program. This is not a “self- help program.” We willingly seek help and to be helped.

With Steps 8 and 9 – we also focus on amends to ourselves, and the concept of “living amends”.

Steps 10 – 12 are often called the “maintenance Steps.” We are finally ready to start “growing up” within the program – we focus on “living” these Steps in our daily lives.

For Step 12 – we ask class participants to “carry this message to others” by speaking at a rehab’s family night, attending another meeting, performing an outreach project, etc.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Total Time – Our experiences have shown that Step Classes can take from 6 mos. to 1 year, depending on how much “homework” and how frequently the class wants to meet.

Materials needed – We use “Nar-Anon 36” and “The Nar-Anon Twelve Step Program”. Also suggested, but not mandatory, is “Paths to Recovery”. Please remember that these materials are copyright protected – our fellowship relies on literature purchases to continue our primary purpose. Many of us have spent thousands of dollars on addiction; the cost of our recovery is inexpensive by comparison! Please do not copy these materials for handing out in your group. We are financially responsible for our own recovery.

Who “leads” the meetings? We chose to use two facilitators for the Step Classes. These may be people who have “worked the Steps,” prior class members, novices to the process or a combination. They are responsible for opening and closing the meeting. They may also set the assignments (# of questions each session) or this can be a collective decision. By opening and closing the Step Classes with the Serenity Prayer, the mood is set for open and honest sharing.

How often to meet: Take a poll among your participants, and let the collective decision determine the frequency. Going any more than 2 weeks between classes (except for holidays) takes emphasis off our personal recovery, often letting life events interfere with our personal recovery.

How much time per session? Our experience indicates that anything more than 1.5 hours adds nothing to the process – it often gets diminishing returns. As step work is a very personal and often emotional experience, 1-1.5 hours maintains the intimacy without exhaustion.

Where to meet: Classes may be held in your normal meeting room (after arrangements made); in a restaurant or coffee shop’s private meeting room; or in rotating people’s homes.

What if you don’t have time to share on each question for that class? You may agree to carry into the next session any question not finished. Alternatively, you may choose to have each person share on a question that “troubled them”; they were “stuck on”; or one that “spoke to them” on a different level.

What if a participant doesn’t do their homework? We permit each person to share on each question. We do not try to control how someone “works” the Step Classes.

What if a participant can’t make a class? For the greater good, we continue each class as determined by the group. A make-up session can be made on a personal level with a person who attended the class

Members may ask, “How do I answer these questions – as of now, or in the past?” We encourage members to answer questions as of the current time – but may need or want to add experiences from the past that continue to influence them.

New people to the group wanting to start the Steps – We often recommend newer people utilize “Progress not Perfection” as a good primer before starting Step Classes. It starts people writing down their answers to specific thoughts – and as a wonderful benefit - it follows the Steps in order. Once again, we suggest new members attend weekly meetings for 3-6 months before beginning Step Classes. This permits time to become familiar with and understand the language, the concepts of sharing/listening, and to learn that they can trust the protection and safety of the group.

Warning: We always caution members to keep their step work protected. Their notebook must be kept in a safe place at all times. Our members know about safety – because of their experiences living with addiction. Although they may share some of the concepts learned in Step Class, we suggest members not share their homework with family members or the addict(s) in their lives.

What if I am afraid to work the steps or what I will find? What if I am not sure about this spiritual stuff? Working the steps is a spiritual journey towards health and inner healing. We are seeking answers to our questions. It is a simple program for complex people. It is always helpful to remember the slogans that have such encouraging phrases as: First things first; Easy does it; Progress not perfection; and, One day at a time. We are embarking on a spiritual journey with and in the loving care of the God of our own understanding. Our Higher Power will guide us up these steps one at a time – one experience, one day, one moment and one understanding at a time. This is a gentle program because it takes time, introspection, and acceptance. When we set aside the time to quiet ourselves, to think, to answer and then to share it is helpful to ask our Higher Power for help. Often memories or experiences long forgotten will come into our awareness. It may be memories of how my actions, reactions or responses were first formed; “old tapes” which play in our heads; or a consistent pattern of behaviors from childhood or early adulthood. Understanding of my past “whys” may help me see that my current and future choices can be changed in a positive way. Willingness to try is all that is required to begin. Much to be gained – and a lot of baggage to lose! A deeper understanding of our Higher Power grows as we move along this recovery path, and we begin to trust the process!

Outside literature: As we work the steps, many members will find outside readings, which “speak” to them. By keeping our Nar-Anon Step Meetings focused only on Nar-Anon CAL (conference-approved literature); we are not diverted by other literature or outside thoughts. Facilitators encourage outside readings, but caution members to keep the focus on the questions posed, and their personal answers.

How does sponsorship fit into Step Classes? Many groups are lacking in someone who has worked the Nar-Anon Steps, sponsors or available sponsors. We encourage sponsorship within our groups, and suggest that further Step Work (more individual and private work) may be accomplished through sponsorship. Step Classes teach the process – living the Steps develops sponsors! It is an individual’s decision to be a sponsor or to request a sponsor. Nar-Anon CAL has several wonderful pieces on Sponsorship. We do suggest that new sponsors have their own sponsor or service sponsor to assist them in the sponsorship process.

Where do the 12 Traditions fit? Some classes handle each Step with a Tradition. Others hold a separate class or classes on the Traditions. It has been our experience that when working the Traditions it helps to look at each Tradition from the perspective of the home group (or regional/world service); the personal home and family; work situations; and, friend groups. “Just as freedom for the individual comes from the 12 Steps” – new freedoms are found within the family, work, friend, home group by working and living the Traditions.

MEMBERS SHARING THEIR ESH WITH STEP CLASSES:

We asked our current class to share their experiences in Step Classes, and these are some of their shares:

1. “I really gain a lot of healing from the Step work. I’ve never really taken a look at myself in such a way as this. I am grateful for the opportunity to take the focus from others and put it on myself in order to improve myself and my relationships with others. It’s fascinating to me to have this new perspective to working these issues.”
2. “Beneficial to meet in a small group – bonding – sharing.”
3. “Step class has helped me be organized and accountable. I like following the format so that I don’t cut one area short or get stuck on one Step. I like having the dual leadership. Step Class allows me to get focused with my thoughts, ideas and goals.”
4. “I like the workbook – it allows me to focus on what I need help with. It allows me to prepare my answers, and organize my thoughts before speaking. I am an analytical person, and need this time to prepare. It is also conversational, which many times is helpful.”
5. “This class is very helpful and helps clarify what the Steps are about. I have been coming to meetings for a couple of years, and never really understood the lingo or how the Steps work until this class.”

As always in this program – take what you like, what will help you in living your best life – and disregard the rest.