



# Sponsorship in CLA



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# Preamble

Clutterers Anonymous (CLA) is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem with clutter and help each other to recover.

We achieve this as individuals, groups, and a fellowship by practicing our 12 Steps of recovery and by being guided by our 12 Traditions. Each of them embodies a set of principles for living life effectively, inside and outside CLA.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop cluttering. There are no dues or fees for membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions, neither soliciting nor accepting outside donations. Our Fellowship is based on suggestion, interchange of experience, rotation of leadership, and service.

Clutterers Anonymous is not affiliated with any public or private organization, political movement, ideology, or religious doctrine; we take no position on outside issues. Our primary purpose is to stop cluttering one day at a time and to carry this message of recovery to clutterers who still suffer.

*Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.*

A.A. "Big Book," *Alcoholics Anonymous*,  
©2001, Alcoholics Anonymous, page 89

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# Sponsorship in CLA

## Sponsorship (A Tool of Recovery)

Sponsorship is a personal and confidential, one-on-one relationship between two clutterers. Sponsorship helps both the sponsor and the sponsee. It is customary that a sponsor have a sponsor. The CLA sponsor guides the sponsee through the program and the 12 Steps and is not necessarily a friend, but someone in whom we can confide. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their Step experience, strength and hope. Choosing a sponsor involves going to several meetings to find someone with whom we can identify—someone who has the type of recovery that we want. (from “A Brief Guide”<sup>2</sup>)

## The Role of Sponsorship

A sponsor is a mentor and guide who shares personal experience, strength, and hope. In recovery, the sponsee learns to evaluate suggestions and apply them accordingly.

Sponsorship is an integral part of our 12-Step recovery program. CLA encourages members to have the experience of being sponsored, being a sponsor, or having a co-sponsor. Primarily, a sponsor offers guidance through the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. Through this relationship, a CLA member further along in the process helps another CLA member [the “sponsee”] utilize the tools and principles of the program. Co-sponsors utilize the Steps, Traditions, and Tools<sup>2,3</sup> of the program through a peer relationship. In the 12-Step tradition, we do not give advice. CLA is a program of suggestion. Sponsors may make suggestions and/or share their experience, strength, and hope.

## Why Sponsorship?

*Step 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.*<sup>4</sup> One of the ways CLA members practice the 12th Step is by becoming sponsors.

A sponsor can help us understand the 3rd Step—”...to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God,<sup>1,2</sup>” or Higher Power (HP)—to address our powerlessness and unmanageability over clutter. Sponsors can encourage those they sponsor to identify and develop relationship with an HP/God of their own understanding.

Being and having a sponsor opens the door to a special relationship. Relationships diminish isolation. Isolation can contribute to clutter. By establishing a spiritual connection, members reduce isolation and begin to grow in their recovery. Relating to a sponsor may help members reduce the sense of isolation and encourage deeper levels of intimacy, beyond what develops through sharing in meetings.

Meetings begin the recovery process. Sharing one-on-one adds another perspective and enhances insights into our cluttering behaviors. The reasons we clutter do not need to be understood before we begin to work the Steps. The more we open ourselves to this process, the more likely we are to experience healing from unhealthy cluttering attitudes and actions. We will reap the benefits of our efforts as we continue the journey.

## **What Is Sponsorship?**

By guiding us through the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, our sponsors prioritize living the spiritual principles of the CLA program. Sponsors encourage a stronger connection to a spiritual source, a higher power of the sponsee’s own understanding. If or when they hear denial and rationalizing, sponsors offer firm, kind, objective feedback. They provide encouragement and validation. Sponsors help us learn to be responsible for our actions.

Sponsorship asks for a commitment to action by both CLA members.

Sponsors give support by sharing their experience, strength, and hope. They may give writing/journaling and decluttering assignments. Although not required, sponsors may act as declutter buddies and/or be available for bookending. By getting to know the person they sponsor better, sponsors may see the “sponsee” through stressful slips and/or relapse situations. Often, sponsors provide an anchor in the storms of clutter. A sponsor may be a compass pointing us in the right direction.

As the 12th Step suggests, reaching out to other clutterers lays the very foundation that helps CLA—and its members—endure.

## Some Definitions and Distinctions

- **Traditional Sponsor:** A CLA member who sponsors another member for an indefinite period of time, often meeting one-on-one and sharing via telephone, texts, and/or email. Sponsors offer guidance using the Steps, Traditions, and Tools of the CLA program. The sponsor and sponsee discuss, negotiate, and form an agreement regarding the parameters of the sponsorship relationship. In this booklet, the word “sponsor” usually refers to this traditional definition.
- **Temporary or Interim Sponsor:** Some CLA members help someone “get started” or sponsor them for a brief period of time, while that person seeks a traditional sponsor. A temporary sponsor may help when a regular sponsor is unavailable (due to illness, relocation, etc.). Sometimes the relationship with a temporary sponsor works well and develops into an ongoing relationship.
- **Multiple Sponsors:** Some people may have a Step sponsor, a service sponsor, and/or a sponsor in another program. Each sponsor fulfills a specific role in the CLA member’s recovery experience. Although this is unusual and possibly confusing, some people find it useful.
- **Co-sponsors:** Occasionally, two CLA members undertake a study of the Steps and/or Traditions as peers. People with

similar issues or length of time in the program may prefer such a relationship. Often, co-sponsors have progressed through the Steps in other programs and are familiar with 12-Step spiritual principles. The co-sponsor relationship may evolve from using the CLA Tools of Bookending and Buddies.<sup>2,3</sup>

- **Long-distance Sponsors:** Because not all members live geographically close to others, they may establish connections with other CLA members who live at a distance. These relationships utilize phone meetings, private telephone calls, texting, emails, and the internet to communicate.
- **Group Sponsor:** Group sponsors help sponsees by providing a safe place to begin their journey through the Steps. A sponsee struggling with an issue can benefit from the experience and success of other members. Hearing other people share their Step writings and reflections may offer the sponsee the encouragement needed to reflect and look within.

If attendance falters, group members may show concern and practice accountability, contacting those who are absent.

## Questions About Sponsorship in New or Small Meetings

**Q:** What if my group is too new, young, or small to have many available sponsors? What do CLA and/or other CLA groups suggest?

**A:** In areas where CLA groups are just beginning and no experienced sponsors are available, a Step Study group committed to meeting regularly can serve as a temporary sponsor for its members. Members read the CLA leaflet, "Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous<sup>4</sup>" to gain an overview of the 12 Steps and can use relevant CLA literature. CLA is working on creating more literature on how to work the Steps. In the meantime, we recommend working from A.A. literature. Group

members can sponsor newcomers up to the last Step completed within the group. For a definition of group sponsors, see the definition in the section above.

## Questions about Sponsorship

**Q:** How does being a sponsor benefit me?

**A:** Sponsoring offers members the opportunity to review the Steps. Watching a sponsee grow in recovery can be uplifting to the sponsor and rejuvenate her program. Observing sponsees as they discover what works and does not work can provide teachable moments for the sponsor, too. When we offer guidance, we renew our own commitment to recovery.

**Q:** Do I have to finish all 12 Steps before I decide to sponsor someone?

**A:** According to CLA's Tools of Recovery,<sup>2,3</sup> "...sponsors share the program up to the level of their experience, strength, and hope." Some sponsors, however, prefer not to sponsor until they have completed their 4th and 5th Steps, and others until they have completed all 12 Steps.

**Q:** What pieces of literature would support my practice and/or study of the 12 Steps? Can I use other 12-Step Program workbooks or guides?

**A:** CLA members are encouraged to use the CLA leaflet, "Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous<sup>3</sup>," other relevant CLA literature, Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) literature (especially *The Big Book*<sup>1</sup> and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*<sup>6</sup>). CLA has no opinion on outside literature between two individuals during sponsorship. Sponsorship is a personal relationship, defined by both parties.

**Q:** *How much time will this process take to complete?*

**A:** Studying the Steps is highly individualized. We encourage

you to begin! Do not let procrastination and perfectionism unduly prolong the process. We believe that steady progress—neither rushing nor dragging—will yield positive results.

**Q:** *What are reasonable expectations for both the sponsor and the sponsee?*

**A:** Honesty, Openmindedness, and Willingness (HOW) go a long way when studying the 12 Steps. Both people need to communicate, as best they can, what they hope to gain from the relationship, remembering that we are all imperfect human beings. Developing healthy, uncluttered relationships is part of recovery. Negotiating time and space for the sponsorship relationship offers both people a chance to grow, make and keep commitments, and establish healthy boundaries. The sponsor learns to listen without judgment. The sponsee learns to share his hopes, dreams, and needs. Both people rely on the guidance of a Higher Power/God of their understanding to help them in the recovery process.

**Q:** *Do CLA sponsors receive special training?*

**A:** “Training” comes through our personal experience of the Steps, Traditions and Tools<sup>2,3</sup>, practicing the spiritual principles of the CLA program in our daily lives. Sponsors often learn from their own sponsors, by attending meetings, sharing with other CLA members, and asking God/a Higher Power for guidance.

Sponsors should be familiar with CLA and A.A. literature.

**Q:** *Can I discuss my relationship with my sponsee with my own sponsor?*

**A:** A sponsor has the option to share an issue with his sponsor, while protecting the anonymity of the sponsee.

**Q:** *As a sponsor, how do I set guidelines and boundaries?*

**A:** Together, the sponsor and sponsee determine the length, frequency, and parameters of their meetings, phone calls,

texts, and/or emails. The sponsor and sponsee may set boundaries regarding discussion of personal issues or issues better addressed in a different Fellowship. A sponsor may set boundaries to practice self-care, modeling healthy behavior with her sponsee. Both people may agree to a trial period for sponsorship, then evaluate their progress at the end of that period. Either person can choose to end a non-beneficial relationship at any time. We hope that love, patience, and tolerance will guide that decision and the conversation.

**Q.** *What do I do if the relationship needs to change or is not working?*

**A.** When issues arise between a sponsor and sponsee, we encourage you to approach the conversation in an open, loving way. Be patient and listen as you both move toward a solution. Sometimes a sponsee may resist change. Sometimes both people need to pause. We suggest praying, then “turning it over” to God and waiting for guidance. It is suggested that both parties refer to readings in the bibliography at the end of this booklet. Then, if changing sponsors seems the best course, the sponsee may need to seek another or a temporary sponsor. Not all relationships are meant to continue. Be grateful for the positive moments you both had or the CLA principles that were shared. We also recommend reading Chapter 7, “Working With Others,” in the A.A. Big Book<sup>1</sup>, and the A.A. pamphlet, “Questions on Sponsorship<sup>5</sup>.”

## For the Sponsee

### What a Sponsee Does Under the Guidance of a Sponsor

Under the guidance of a CLA sponsor, a sponsee:

- works the 12 Steps, practicing them in all his affairs;

- learns how the 12 Steps pertain to the individual, the 12 Traditions pertain to groups, and the Tools pertain to Action;
- places principles before personalities;
- grows in relationship with a Higher Power and the Fellowship, realizing that he or she cannot do it alone;
- practices faith and releases fear;
- becomes more open to consider new options and ideas;
- finds inspiration in other members' experience, strength, and hope;
- develops and implements self-affirming life skills;
- lets go of old ways, including self-criticism;
- learns to take personal responsibility;
- identifies and avoids procrastination;
- acknowledges life's downside, but focuses on the positive;
- learns to be supportive of others;
- sees time as a valuable resource and uses it wisely;
- learns to set reasonable goals; and
- listens to feedback and asks for help when necessary.

## **Suggestions for Selecting a Sponsor**

- Attend meetings face to face or on the telephone and listen carefully as other members share. Don't be afraid to approach a prospective sponsor.
- Call CLA members for program-centered outreach; share your struggles and identify changes you hope to accomplish as you recover.
- Actively seek a sponsor who possesses many of these qualities:
  - demonstrates continued recovery, utilizing CLA's Steps, Traditions, and Tools.
  - has a relationship with a Higher Power/God of his or her understanding.
  - acts responsibly and accountably, refraining from blaming other people;
  - is someone with whom you feel comfortable and safe when sharing;
  - displays reliability—spends time with you as agreed, listens attentively and in confidence;

- maintains a relationship with a sponsor or co-sponsor;
- aligns with CLA's message of recovery as expressed in our literature;
- shares their experience, strength and hope in meaningful ways; and
- strives to maintain serenity in the midst of unresolved issues.

## **Questions a Sponsee Could Ask a Prospective Sponsor**

The questions below are examples of what a sponsee might ask a prospective sponsor, but the answers are unique to each sponsor.

- What does recovery mean to you personally?
- Can you help me understand what the relationship is between clutter and the 12 Steps?
- Will we be working on the 12 Steps together? Do I need to write on the Steps?
- I don't believe in God. Can the 12 Steps still help me?
- How often will we talk? Will we set up a schedule?
- Can we talk in between our scheduled meeting times?
- Can we talk about things other than clutter? Like, if I'm having a bad day, can we talk about that?
- Can we talk about how my clutter affects my relationships?
- Are you okay with our socializing outside of our sponsorship sessions?
- Can you help advise me about a cleaning routine?
- Can you offer me guidance with my paper clutter?
- If we live in the same area, are you willing to come over and help me declutter?

## **Strategies for Handling Overwhelm Independent of Your Sponsor**

It's common to doubt your progress or feel overwhelmed. You may use some recommendations to weather tough times while waiting to reach your sponsor.

- Remember, you are not alone.
- Attend a meeting and share if possible.
- Contact program friends.
- Draft a gratitude list and share it with someone you trust.
- List your accomplishments.
- Read CLA and A.A. literature.
- Journal or write about the event and your feelings about it.
- Share your writing, burn it, or put it in your “God-Box,” which some members use as a symbolic act of writing down concerns and releasing them to their Higher Power.
- Pray and meditate, seeking conscious contact with the God of your understanding.
- Do the footwork and let go of the outcome.
- Get physical. Walk around the block, do the dishes, clean the house, exercise, or practice yoga.
- Be still, sit with your pets, notice the birds or other parts of nature.
- Ask for help and be willing to accept it.
- Slow down; focus on your breath; practice breathing deeply and slowly.
- Recite or reflect upon CLA Recovery Affirmations and Slogans found in CLA literature<sup>2,3</sup> and also on our website: [www.ClutterersAnonymous.org](http://www.ClutterersAnonymous.org).
- Remember that thoughts and feelings are not necessarily rooted in fact. Feelings can change.
- When you feel calmer, form a plan to support you in the future.
- Celebrate all your victories.

## For the Sponsor

### Sponsoring in CLA

As sponsors, we can either practice new healthy behaviors or sink into old patterns. A sponsor must consider potential pitfalls: sponsoring too many people, difficulty letting go of

a relationship that is clearly not working, or over-committing. Some CLA members have other issues such as co-dependence, other addictive behaviors, and caregiving, etc. Therefore, attention to boundaries is essential, along with staying focused on the Steps, Traditions, and our own personal recovery. Sponsors should set appropriate time limits when conversing and listen without trying to fix things. Some sponsees do better with a more rigid structure, while others thrive with a more flexible approach.

## **Questions a Sponsor Can Ask Himself or Herself**

- Do I have a working knowledge of CLA- and A.A.-approved literature?
- Can I explain basic program concepts and terminology?
- Am I willing to encourage my sponsee to contact other recovering CLA members?
- Will I respect confidentiality, sharing what a sponsee says with someone else only if we both agree in advance?
- Will I seek guidance along this journey from my Higher Power?
- Will I encourage my sponsee to develop an ongoing relationship with a Higher Power?
- Will I be able to remember that God is the ultimate authority in my sponsee's life, and that my sponsees are responsible for their own decisions?
- Am I willing to share how I personally utilize the 12 Steps and apply the principles of the program in my life?
- Can I give without expectations, mindful of the principle, "We keep what we have by giving it away"?
- Am I able to admit that I do not have all the answers, and will I ask for help if needed?
- Will I use "I" statements when sharing my thoughts and feelings?
- Will I honor the nature of the relationship by discussing the sponsee's issues rather than my own?
- Am I able to display sensitivity when dealing with trauma, grief, and other delicate matters?

- Can I help the sponsee to focus on “living in the solution” rather than “living in the problem”?
- Am I willing to challenge the sponsee to identify faulty thinking, unhealthy patterns, and other obstacles to recovery?
- Will I practice compassion, kindness, patience, and tolerance?
- Will I listen and ask questions without making assumptions and judgments?
- Will I seek to maintain healthy boundaries with my sponsee, acknowledging that romantic, unethical, or illegal behavior is inappropriate?
- Am I capable of providing structure without rigidity, allowing for some flexibility?
- Do I “carry the message, not the mess”...and not the member?

## **Questions a Sponsor Could Ask a Prospective Sponsee**

- Why are you seeking a CLA sponsor at this time?
- Can you anticipate obstacles you may have if we begin this process together?
- Are you willing to attend CLA meetings regularly?
- Are you willing to meet with me regularly by phone or in person?
- Are you willing to write on the Steps and complete assignments I suggest?
- Will you be open to my suggestions or those of others?
- Will you make your best effort to practice honesty in our relationship?
- When we meet, we will focus on the Steps, Traditions, Tools, and solutions; we may not socialize. How do you feel about that?
- Either one of us can end this relationship at any time. If that circumstance arises, can we establish the best way to do that? Can we agree to give each other some notice?

- I will sponsor you in areas of my experience, strength, and hope. If I suggest another CLA member or resource for areas outside my knowledge base, will you consider them?

## The Rights and Responsibilities of Sponsors and Sponsees

You both have the right to:

- say “No,” especially if feeling unsafe or not ready;
- be treated with dignity, respect and appreciation;
- honor your own feelings, thoughts, and opinions, expressing them appropriately;
- change your mind about a decision;
- make choices, independent of the wishes, requests, or demands of others;
- say you don’t know or don’t understand;
- ask for what you want or need;
- take care of yourself, no matter your circumstances;
- have respectful conflict, giving and receiving feedback if a conversation feels unsafe and/or overwhelming; and
- enjoy privacy and safety in your own sacred space.

You both have the opportunity to:

- be respectful and considerate of each other;
- handle frustration and disappointment in a healthy way;
- set appropriate boundaries; and
- be accountable for your actions, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings.

## A Suggested Prayer

Some sponsor/sponsee relationships may fail because both parties are unable to set aside their beliefs and judgments.

Asking a Higher Power to help us release all that we think we know can be useful in continuing the relationship and working the Steps.

Here is a variation of a prayer that many 12-Step Fellowships have found very helpful that can be prayed by both the sponsee and the sponsor:

“Dear God, please help me set aside everything I know, and everything I think I know about myself, my cluttering, these Steps, and especially about you, dear God, so that I may have an open mind and a new experience with all these things. Please help me to see the truth.”

## Suggested Bibliography

<sup>1</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous*, also known as “The Big Book,” ©Alcoholics Anonymous 2001

<sup>2</sup> “A Brief Guide,” ©Clutterers Anonymous, 2009

<sup>3</sup> “Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous,” ©Clutterers Anonymous, 2009

<sup>4</sup> “Is CLA for You? A Newcomers Guide to Recovery” (©Clutterers Anonymous, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> “Questions on Sponsorship,” ©Alcoholics Anonymous,

<sup>6</sup> *Twelve and Twelve*, ©Alcoholics Anonymous, 1981

“Job or no job—wife or no wife—we simply do not stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of dependence on God. Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust in God and clean house.”—A.A. Big Book, page 98.