

What is AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)? How Does it Help in Recovering from Drinking Problem?

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This is the continuation of series on Alcoholism in Tiranga. Dr Vasudev Makhija outlined in the earlier issues of Tiranga, importance of recognizing and accepting alcoholism as a medical disease and seeking appropriate treatment. Dr Makhija described treatment options including AA program. AA is an immensely powerful and effective treatment of alcoholism. And, it is free!

Without such intervention, 90% of alcoholics relapse in first 9 months of sobriety. Of those who attend AA meetings, 47 to 57 % remain sober after 9 months.

What is AA?

AA is an international organization that enables its members to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. AA is self-supporting and is not affiliated with any professional or political organization. Its requirement for membership is that the person have a drinking problem and a desire to quit drinking. There are no age or educational requirements. AA meetings are free and offered in almost every town. They are available world-wide including in India and on cruises.

Program of AA:

AA program of recovery is based on Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics. You can visit

AA website at www.aa.org to review them in entirety. The first step is an important step towards recovery. This is the acceptance that the persons who drink accept that they are powerless over alcohol and that their lives have become unmanageable because of alcohol. These steps and traditions are learned and reinforced through the AA meetings.

AA program is presented, described and discussed during the AA meetings. AA meetings usually last for 1 hour and are preceded and followed by informal socializing. This helps people to feel comfortable and builds bonds between members. Some AA meetings are exclusively for men or women. Other meetings are mixed. AA meetings are of various types.

Meetings can be Open or Closed. Closed meetings are for AA members only or prospective AA members, whereas Open meeting allow family members and others to attend the meetings as well.

In Speaker meetings, AA members tell their stories. They describe their experiences with alcohol and their recovery. They discuss their struggles and the devastation that alcohol causes in their lives. They speak about their journey of recovery and provide a message of hope to those who are struggling.

In "Discussion Meetings", an AA member briefly describes his or her experience and then leads a discussion on a topic related to recovery. Step Meetings usually are closed meetings and consist of a discussion of the meaning and outcomes of each of the Twelve Steps. Step meetings are not usually for the beginners.

Sponsorship is important process during recovery. Each person joining AA is encouraged to find and connect with a sponsor. A sponsor is another AA member willing to offer person-person guidance in working the AA program. A sponsor is typically a person who has a substantial period of sobriety and who personally has studied and worked the Twelve Steps. Sponsor understands the struggles of a recovering alcoholic. Sponsor serves as an invaluable resource during recovery and serves as a great source of emotional support and guidance.

Groups are meant to help others to understand their addiction, the behaviors that are responsible for addiction and help them devise strategies to cope with their cravings and triggers to prevent relapse. Relapse is when someone who has quit drinking starts to drink again. Let's talk about how AA works.

These meetings provide an opportunity and environment to develop bond between AA members.

There is a mutual sharing of experiences with a reassurance that confidentiality is maintained. Whatever is discussed during the AA meeting, does not leave the meeting. No one is judged, and there are no expectations or criticisms. After years of being criticized and feeling worthless, the alcoholic is offered an environment free from judgment and he discovers that his experience is of value to others. Learning occurs at multiple levels and includes how sober alcoholics view their disease, how they relate to people and what they do to stay sober. AA teaches that alcohol is the problem not the spouse, job or lack of willpower. Alcoholic learns to substitute people for alcohol. They learn to fight the urge to drink through caring and supportive interaction with others. Past faulty coping strategies are recognized and replaced with healthy strategies that help them to stay sober. AA increases a person's capacity to rely on themselves by offering self-soothing slogans: Easy does it, one day at a time, Live and let live.

In conclusion, the program works and has helped millions across the world. The twelve Steps provide a concrete, tangible course of action; they trigger development of positive emotions and skills that address craving for alcohol. Following these steps also improves person's character and relationships. I have been practicing psychiatry for 30 years and have seen the tremendous impact that AA has on person's recovery. I advise you to encourage anyone with alcohol related problems to participate in AA as it works!

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SAMHIN (South Asian Mental Health Initiative and Network) has started AA meetings for South Asians. These meetings are held at First Presbyterian Church in Iselin, NJ, from 8pm to 9 pm every Thursday. Some members of this AA are available to talk to anyone with alcohol related is-

ssues even before one decides to attend the meetings. You can find more details including contact information of individuals who you can reach out to with questions. Most of them speak at least one Indian language besides English. AA offers a variety of printed literature that is invaluable resource during recovery. At the South Asian AA meetings literature is available in many South Asian languages.

SAMHIN, South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network, is a non-profit organization that strives to address the mental health needs of the South Asians.

If you know someone that has a drinking problem and has a desire to quit, visit www.samhin.org/alcoholics-anonymous/



South Asian Alcoholics Anonymous

The First Presbyterian Church of Iselin

1295 Oak Tree Road

Iselin, NJ 08830

Note: Entrance on Middlesex Avenue

AA Meetings (FREE) Every Thursday

8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

"AA Meetings for anyone with drinking problem and a desire to quit."