

DISTRICT 41 MESSENGER

District 41 of Northern Illinois Area 20
Serving Addison, Bensenville, Elmhurst,
Oakbrook Terrace, Villa Park
& Wood Dale

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ENJOYING THE HOLIDAYS AHEAD SOBER

Whether you have “a few 24 hours under your belt” or you are new to the recovery principles of AA; the holidays ahead can prove challenging for all of us. Who hasn’t had their expectations dashed, a drink pushed our direction at an office party, and extra financial stress from travel and gift-giving?

We can all expect that COVID will put a limit on the number of celebrations this season. The holidays from Halloween through the New Year are typically full of parties, get-togethers, and activities with family, friends, and coworkers. Many of us will struggle with the limitations from COVID and the missed opportunities to see our loved ones. With or without these celebrations, the holidays are generally the most stressful time of the year for everyone.

The daily routine that has kept you sober through today is all the more important in helping you to keep your sanity and your sobriety throughout the holiday season. Each seemingly small sober action that you take, from your wake-up time to when you go to bed, combines with the other sober actions that you take to build a foundation that will keep you safe, sane, and sober. It’s easy to get out of your routine during the holidays, but you – with the help of your Higher Power and AA – can stay on your path. Here are some things you can do to protect our sobriety during the holidays ahead:

1. Maintain Your Spiritual Practice

It’s important to maintain your current spiritual practice. If this isn’t something that you currently do, you might consider adding in prayer, meditation, yoga, or simple breathing exercises to your daily routine. Your relationship with your Higher Power will be essential support during the holidays. Ask for help if you feel that spiritual relationship needs attention and reinforce that trust and dependence sooner than later.

2. Keep Your Meeting Schedule

It’s important to keep your routine. Go to your planned meetings even if one falls on the actual holiday. Some places have additional meetings scheduled during the holiday called Alcathons. These are back-to-back meetings scheduled every hour throughout a holiday (Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s). This can be a great add-on meeting to your current schedule. Plan ahead and make sure you have access to a meeting schedule for wherever you will be spending your holiday.

3. Be of Service or Volunteer

Being of service is an essential part of our program and can help by reinforcing the need for you to attend a meeting, meet with another member, and fill some idle time with gratitude. Pick up a coffee, chairperson, or speaking commitment now. Open yourself to the possibility of sponsorship. Be ready to help!

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*It's the
most
Wonderful
Time
of the year*

OUR AA GROUPS TAKE ON CORONAVIRUS

PHYSICALLY DISTANCED BUT DIGTALLY CONNECTED

A.A. in the digital age has certainly taken on a new meaning in these challenging times.

Most recently, Coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected many A.A. groups that normally would meet in- person. The General Service Office (G.S.O.) of Alcoholics Anonymous U.S./Canada, which functions as a repository for A.A. members and groups who are looking for shared experience from the A.A. Fellowship, has some general experience to share regarding this issue.

Some A.A. members have shared that meeting online has been an adjustment and has, at times, had its challenges. Adhering to state/provincial and federal guidelines, many A.A. members have switched from “in-person” meetings to digital meetings, on platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, Conference Calls, GoToMeeting and What's App, allowing the group to continue to focus on A.A.'s primary purpose: to carry its message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers.

In a sense, however, this current experience is not necessarily new for A.A. From its earliest beginnings, the A.A. founders recognized the need to reach beyond the face-to-face transmission of the A.A. message, giving rise to the development of A.A.'s basic text, the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. This book and other A.A. materials, which are widely available on multiple platforms – digital, audio, and video – has literally circled the globe and opened the door to recovery for thousands of alcoholics looking for help. Even prior to this pandemic, many A.A. members around the world – whether home-bound, living in remote areas, or service members stationed in far-flung places – have counted on participating in A.A. remotely through A.A. literature, phone calls with other members, correspondence by letter or email and meetings online.

While many A.A. members are for the first time reporting the shift from in-person meetings to digital platforms, for many alcoholics around the world, remote connections and digital platforms are how they initially encountered and maintain their recovery in A.A. even prior to the pandemic.

Many A.A. groups have shared with G.S.O. that they are now finding great connections in digital meetings and want to offer that same experience to anyone who has yet to attend their first meeting.

There are A.A. resources and information for those seeking help with a drinking problem:

- Get local A.A. information through G.S.O.'s website https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/find-aa-resources
- Download G.S.O.'s free of charge A.A.W.S. Meeting Guide App.



“...Alcoholics Anonymous is not a place or an event; it exists in the hearts, minds and help freely offered by its members.”

- AA Grapevine-Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous. Its purpose is to provide A.A. member sharing through its magazines (in English and Spanish), websites, audios, and e-books. Members share on topics related to recovery, including recovery on digital platforms. Often referred to as A.A.'s “meeting in print,” AA Grapevine communicates the experience, strength and hope of its contributors and reflects a broad geographic spectrum of current A.A. experience. For more information visit: <https://www.aagrapevine.org/we-are-here-to-help>

Source: https://www.aa.org/press-releases/en_US/no_page/physically-distanced-but-digittally-connected-the-alcoholics-anonymous-message-carries-on-amid-coronavirus-covid-19

THE IMPACT OF COVID19 SOCIALIZING RESTRICTIONS ON ADDICTION

Since March, social distancing has meant reduced connection, a core psychological need for humans. For people in recovery, connection, and a strong support system are particularly important. Additionally, social distancing may limit access to medications, peer-support groups, and other vital resources.

Typically, relapse rates for people with substance use disorders hover around 40 to 60 percent. It's too early to say whether these rates have increased during the pandemic. However, here are a few statistics we do know so far:

1. Spikes in overdose-related deaths and emergency calls have been reported in localities across the US. These include Cayuga County in New York, Hamilton County in Ohio, and Jacksonville, Florida.
2. Alcohol sales increased 55 percent in the second-to-last week of March 2020, compared with the previous year.
3. A study by Well Being Trust and the American Academy of Family Physicians estimated up to 150,000 additional "deaths of despair" from drugs, alcohol, and suicide, linked to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, experts caution that people struggling with addiction during COVID-19 are especially vulnerable to relapse.

Meanwhile, the U.S. unemployment rate reached 14.7 percent in April 2020, and as of July remains above 10 percent. Not only can job loss contribute to financial worries and stress, it can also disrupt structure and routine, which are crucial for people in recovery.

"Risk factors for relapse include isolation, stress, depression, and even boredom. These experiences drive some people to self-medicate. Unfortunately, all of these risk factors are common experiences during the current pandemic."

Know Your Triggers

Awareness is an important step in steering clear of relapse. Ask yourself;

"What are my triggers?"

"What situations, people, or feelings make me want to drink alcohol?"

While you can't control every aspect of your life, knowing your triggers for relapse allows you to recognize risky situations and act appropriately.

ASK FOR HELP!

Once you identify your triggers, create a plan:

What can you do to avoid this trigger?

If you do encounter the trigger, what will you do to prevent yourself from drinking?

For example, if loneliness is a trigger, make a list of people you will call if you feel lonely. If you find that social situations are a trigger, consider asking a friend to help you stick to your limits, or choose some alcohol substitutes to drink instead. One of the few upsides of having to stay at home is that it's actually easier to avoid these situations! Take your advantages where you can find them.

Article created with help from Ria Heal

MORE ABOUT "US"

AND COVID19

COVID19 related social isolation and stress can increase susceptibility to substance misuse, addiction, and relapse.

Substance use can lead to immune system, respiratory, and pulmonary changes and may increase susceptibility to COVID19 as well as complications.

A number of remote resources are available to help assist individuals and loved ones.

- University of Michigan
Addiction Center

During these uncertain times, those who misuse or abuse alcohol and/or other drugs are particularly vulnerable. The stress from social isolation and other COVID-19 related life changes can lead to or worsen substance use and misuse. There are also health risks resulting from chronic alcohol/drug use as it weakens the immune system and puts stress on the body's cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

Alcohol and COVID19:

Alcohol consumption weakens the immune system and can increase the susceptibility to certain infectious diseases. For individuals who are dependent on alcohol, restricted access could lead to symptoms of withdrawal. Alcohol withdrawal can be fatal if not managed properly.

Source: <https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/psychiatry/>



And acceptance is the answer to *all* of my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation- some fact of my life- unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept my life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes.

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Alcoholics Anonymous

Story 16 -Acceptance was the answer

WHAT IS ACCEPTANCE?

A Grapevine article by Bill W. from March 1962

One way to get at the meaning of the principle of acceptance is to meditate upon it in the context of AA's much used prayer, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Essentially this is to ask for the resources of grace by which we may make spiritual progress under all conditions. Greatly emphasized in this wonderful prayer is a need for the kind of wisdom that discriminates between the possible and the impossible. We shall also see that life's formidable array of pains and problems will require many different degrees of acceptance as we try to apply this valued principle.

Sometimes we have to find the right kind of acceptance for each day. Sometimes we need to develop acceptance for what may come to pass tomorrow, and yet again we shall have to accept a condition that may never change. Then, too, there frequently has to be a right and realistic acceptance of grievous flaws within ourselves and serious faults within those about us - defects that may not be fully remedied for years, if ever.

All of us will encounter failures, some retrievable and some not. We shall often meet with defeat - sometimes by accident, sometimes self-inflicted, and at still other times dealt to us by the injustice and violence of other people. Most of us will meet up with some degree of worldly success, and here the problem of the right kind of acceptance will be really difficult. Then there will be illness and death. How indeed shall we be able to accept all these?

It is always worthwhile to consider how grossly that good word acceptance can be misused. It can be warped to justify nearly every brand of weakness, nonsense, and folly. For instance, we can "accept" failure as a chronic condition, forever without profit or remedy. We can "accept" worldly success pridefully, as something wholly of our own making. We can also "accept" illness and death as certain evidence of a hostile and godless universe. With these twistings of acceptance, we AAs have had vast experience. Hence we constantly try to remind ourselves that these perversions of acceptance are just gimmicks for excuse-making: a losing game at which we are, or at least have been, the world's champions.

This is why we treasure our Serenity Prayer so much. It brings a new light to us that can dissipate our old-time and nearly fatal habit of fooling ourselves. In the radiance of this prayer we see that defeat, rightly accepted, need be no disaster. We now know that we do not have to run away, nor ought we again try to overcome adversity by still another bulldozing power drive that can only push up obstacles before us faster than they can be taken down.

On entering AA, we become the beneficiaries of a very different experience. Our new way of staying sober is literally founded upon the proposition that "Of ourselves, we are nothing, the Father doeth the works." In Steps One and Two of our recovery program, these ideas are specifically spelled out: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol that our lives had become unmanageable" - "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." We couldn't lick alcohol with our own remaining resources and so we accepted the further fact that dependence upon a higher power (if only our AA group) could do this hitherto impossible job. The moment we were able to fully accept these facts, our release from the alcohol compulsion had begun. For most of us this pair of acceptances had required a lot of exertion to achieve. Our whole treasured philosophy of self-sufficiency had to be cast aside. This had not been done with old-fashioned willpower; it was instead a matter of developing the willingness to accept these new facts of living. We neither ran nor fought. But accept we did. And then we were free. There had been no irretrievable disaster.

"This is why we treasure our Serenity Prayer so much. It brings a new light to us that can dissipate our old-time and nearly fatal habit of fooling ourselves. In the radiance of this prayer we see that defeat, rightly accepted, need be no disaster." Bill W.

This kind of acceptance and faith is capable of producing 100 percent sobriety. In fact it usually does; and it must, else we could have no life at all. But the moment we carry these attitudes into our emotional problems, we find that only relative results are possible. Nobody can, for example, become completely free from fear, anger, and pride. Hence in this life we shall attain nothing like perfect humility and love. So we shall have to settle, respecting most of our problems, for a very gradual progress, punctuated sometimes by heavy setbacks. Our old-time attitudes of "all or nothing" will have to be abandoned.

Therefore our very first problem is to accept our present circumstances as they are, ourselves as we are, and the people about us as they are. This is to adopt a realistic humility without which no genuine advance can even begin. Again and again, we shall need to return to that unflattering point of departure. This is an exercise in acceptance that we can profitably practice every day of our lives. Provided we strenuously avoid turning these realistic surveys of the facts of life into unrealistic alibis for apathy or defeatism, they can be the sure foundation upon which increased emotional health and therefore spiritual progress can be built. At least this seems to be my own experience.

Another exercise that I practice is to try for a full inventory of my blessings and then for a right acceptance of the many gifts that are mine - both temporal and spiritual. Here I try to achieve a state of joyful gratitude. When such a brand of gratitude is repeatedly affirmed and pondered, it can finally displace the natural tendency to congratulate myself on whatever progress I may have been enabled to make in some areas of living. I try hard to hold fast to the truth that a full and thankful heart cannot entertain great conceits. When brimming with gratitude, one's heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion that we can ever know.

In times of very rough going, the grateful acceptance of my blessings, oft repeated, can also bring me some of the serenity of which our prayer speaks. Whenever I fall under acute pressures I lengthen my daily walks and slowly repeat our Serenity Prayer in rhythm to my steps and breathing. If I feel that my pain has in part been occasioned by others, I try to repeat, "God grant me the serenity to love their best, and never fear their worst." This benign healing process of repetition, sometimes necessary to persist with for days, has seldom failed to restore me to at least a workable emotional balance and perspective.

Another helpful step is to steadfastly affirm the understanding that pain can bring. Indeed pain is one of our greatest teachers. Though I still find it difficult to accept today's pain and anxiety with any great degree of serenity - as those more advanced in the spiritual life seem able to do - I can, if I try hard, give thanks for present pain nevertheless. I find the willingness to do this by contemplating the lessons learned from past suffering - lessons which have led to the blessings I now enjoy. I can remember, if I insist, how the agonies of alcoholism, the pain of rebellion and thwarted pride, have often led me to God's grace, and so to a new freedom. So, as I walk along, I repeat still other phrases such as these, "Pain is the touchstone of progress" . . . "Fear no evil" . . . "This, too, will pass" . . . "This experience can be turned to benefit."

These fragments of prayer bring far more than mere comfort. They keep me on the track of right acceptance; they break up my compulsive themes of guilt, depression, rebellion, and pride; and sometimes they endow me with the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

To those who never have given these potent exercises in acceptance a real workout, I recommend them highly the next time the heat is on. Or, for that matter, at any time!

God
grant me
the
Serenity
to accept
the things I cannot
change,
Courage
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the difference

-THIS NEWSLETTER-

HOW IT CAME TO BE

Since March of 2015, The District 41 Messenger has arrived in AA meeting rooms along with the change of each season. This newsletter began in a familiar way to many of us – two alcoholics looking to carry the message of recovery and hope through the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This issue is created with gratitude for and recognition of this original pair who spoke about the possibility of a local newsletter six years ago.

Since that time, 22 editions have been carefully researched, prepared and, shared by one AA member. Thank you, past editor, for your service and support of helping others by preparing this newsletter every season for the past six years.

As your new editor, I will try to bring news and topics that support our members in District 41 while keeping in mind the special history of the publication and the heartfelt creativeness of the previous editor. I am thankful to be part of this service work. I will do my best!

Note: All editions of the District 41 Messenger can be found on the District 41 website: dupage41aa.org

District 41 Messenger is published quarterly by District 41 of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a service letter to inform district members of service opportunities, events, and experiences relevant to carrying the AA message, in and through service. Opinions expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not necessarily express or reflect the thinking of Alcoholics Anonymous, District 41, or the editor. This newsletter is a confidential document. **Please do not take it to jails, treatment centers, etc.**



MORE: ENJOYING THE HOLIDAYS AHEAD SOBER

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4. Set Boundaries with Family

Setting healthy boundaries with your family is important to recovery, especially during the holidays. While every family situation is unique, you may find that you need to spend just a little less time with your family so that you can balance your meeting schedule as well as your self-care routine. You may also need to explain to your family that you have commitments at meetings or other sober events that are vital to your sobriety during this holiday season. If members of your family drink, you may also need to set new boundaries or limitations to attending those gatherings to ensure your sobriety. Always have a way out by driving separately or a plan that allows you to leave if you need to. (see #6)

5. Use the Buddy System

The buddy system is another great tool for surviving and having fun at holiday events. If you absolutely have to attend a gathering where there will be alcohol, consider inviting a friend in the program who is comfortable and willing to support you by attending as well. If you go alone, then have a program buddy or sponsor ready to call for support with planned times to check-in. Most importantly, you need to keep your sobriety as the highest priority and truly consider the dangers before, during, and after the gathering. You can be sure that no one at the gathering will be wearing a T-shirt that says “Alcohol—cunning, baffling, powerful!” Take nothing for granted and protect your sobriety!

6. Have an Exit Strategy

Your buddy can also be an exit strategy at any holiday event where you might feel uncomfortable and need to leave. It's always a good idea during holiday outings to have an escape plan in place so that you don't feel guilty leaving if you need to. You can also have a friend or family member available to call and even pick you up if you need to leave. Remember that protecting your sobriety is your first priority.

7. Call your sponsor

During the holidays, your sponsor may ask you to add additional check-ins or step work. Make sure your sponsor knows that you're going to attend a certain holiday events and stay in contact with them. Your sponsor or other members of your program can help you hold yourself accountable by being available by phone. Keep you Higher Power close as well!

8. Keep a Journal

Journaling can be part of your recovery program. A daily written 10th step or just the journaling of your feelings can be very therapeutic. A journal of your holiday experiences also gives you something to share with your sponsor after the holidays in order to gain further insights.

9. Go to Sober Events or Create New Traditions with Your Sober Family

There are many new and exciting things to experience during a *sober* holiday season. You will likely remember everything that happened, and you will avoid the physical sickness and remorse. You will also find that there are many sober holiday events and activities out there (virtual and in-person); new traditions for you to establish with your friends and family.

Created with help from heartlandhouse.org—staying-sober-during-the-holidays