



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Alcoholics Anonymous

AA is a free, peer-led mutual aid program for people who want to stop drinking. It runs on the 12 Steps: principles and actions members work through, usually with a sponsor (an experienced member who guides them one-on-one). No one holds a clinical credential. Shared experience is the point.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- Built on a spiritually informed framework. The Steps reference a "higher power."
- If that framing doesn't fit, SMART Recovery is a well-researched secular alternative.
- Not a substitute for mental health care, and no medication support. In crisis? Call or text 988.

What it's for

For anyone who wants to stop drinking alcohol. Free, with no intake or assessment.

Not a treatment for other substances. Separate programs exist for those.

Not mental health care, though many find it eases isolation and shame.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- 1** Meetings usually run 60 minutes: a reading, a speaker's story, then open sharing.
- 2** You're never required to speak. Many people listen for weeks before they do.
- 3** No therapist guides the room, and meetings vary in size, tone, and culture.
- 4** If one doesn't feel right, try another before writing off AA. Most cities have dozens.

AA has more rigorous research behind it than most peer support programs.

- A 2020 Cochrane review of 27 studies found AA and Twelve-Step Facilitation **at least as effective** as treatments like CBT on most drinking outcomes.¹
- AA/TSF was superior to other treatments for continuous abstinence and remission.¹
- It also produced substantial healthcare cost savings.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

- **Keep coming back.** Consistency is where the program works.
- **Get a sponsor.** One-to-one support between meetings matters.
- **Try different meetings.** Each group has its own feel. Find your home group.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is the meeting open (anyone) or closed (for people with a drinking problem)?
- 2** What's the format: speaker, discussion, or step study?
- 3** How do I find a sponsor when I'm ready?
- 4** How often should I go early on?

Ready to find a group?

Browse 2,000+ therapy and support groups in all 50 states.

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

Alcoholics Anonymous · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Kelly, J. F., Humphreys, K., & Ferri, M. Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs for alcohol use disorder. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (2020), Article CD012880.
- 2 Kelly, J. F., Abry, A., Ferri, M., & Humphreys, K. Alcoholics Anonymous and 12-step facilitation treatments for alcohol use disorder: a distillation of a 2020 Cochrane review. Alcohol and Alcoholism (2020).

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