

Suggested Meeting Format

We have found that consistent use of this format keeps meetings focused on OA recovery, reinforces our program and encourages unity. It also provides a reassuring feeling of continuity—an important factor in membership retention. Each group may modify this format to better suit its needs.

The meeting begins at _____

- 1.** “Welcome to the *[day and time]* _____ meeting of Overeaters Anonymous. My name is _____. I am a compulsive eater and your leader for this meeting.”
- 2.** “Will those who wish, please join me in the Serenity Prayer:
God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”
- 3.** “As we extend the heart and hand of the OA Fellowship to those who still suffer, let us be mindful of OA’s Unity With Diversity Policy, which respects our differences, yet unites us in the solution to our common problem. Whatever problem you may have with food, you are welcome at this meeting, regardless of race, creed, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or any other trait. Are there any compulsive eaters here besides myself?

“Is there anyone here for a first, second or third time? Would you please tell us your first name so we can welcome you? If you are returning to OA or are visiting from another area, please tell us your first name so we can also welcome you. *[Welcome each person by name.]*

“We encourage you to:
 - get a sponsor to help guide your recovery;
 - develop a plan of eating and if you wish, write it down and report daily to your sponsor; and
 - read OA-approved literature to develop a working knowledge of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.”
- 4.** “**The following is the OA Preamble:**
Overeaters Anonymous is a Fellowship of individuals who, through shared experience, strength and hope, are recovering from compulsive overeating.
We welcome everyone who wants to stop eating compulsively. There are no dues or fees for members; we are self-supporting through our own contributions, neither soliciting nor accepting outside donations. OA 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 abstain from compulsive eating and to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of OA to those who still suffer.”
- 5.** *[Ask someone to read “Our Invitation to You,” which includes the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous. Then ask someone to read The Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous. Some meetings may also decide to read The Twelve Concepts of OA Service or to read the Concept corresponding to the month of the year.]*

6. STATEMENT ON ABSTINENCE AND RECOVERY: “Abstinence in Overeaters Anonymous is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program.”

7. TOOLS: “The OA tools of recovery help us work the Steps and refrain from compulsive overeating. The nine tools are: a plan of eating, sponsorship, meetings, telephone, writing, literature, action plan, anonymity and service. For more information, read *The Tools of Recovery* pamphlet.” [Or read *The Tools of Recovery* (abridged) included with this meeting format.]

8. SPONSORS: “Sponsorship is one of our keys to success. Sponsors are OA members committed to abstinence and to living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their experience and strengthen their recovery through this service to others. To find a sponsor, look for someone who has what you want, and ask how he or she is achieving it. Will all abstinent sponsors please identify themselves.”

9. [Pass the meeting record book around and ask members to sign their names with phone numbers and email addresses, if they would like. Pass the record book around a second time so members may write down phone numbers and email addresses to call or write later.]

10. LITERATURE: “Only OA-approved literature is displayed at this meeting. Many OA members find that reading our literature on a daily basis further reinforces how to live the Twelve Steps. You will also find subscription forms for *Lifeline* magazine on the literature table. This makes a great gift for yourself or a sponsee. Do Twelfth-Step work by ordering a gift subscription for your doctor’s or other professional’s office.” [If your group has a *Lifeline Rep*,* instruct the members to see their *Lifeline Rep* for more details.]

[Ask someone to serve at the literature table during the break and after the meeting.]

*Your group can order *Lifeline Rep* kits on the oa.org Web site.

11. REPORTS: [Secretary makes announcements; presents chips and medallions, if customary. Intergroup representative’s report and Treasurer’s report are to be given once a month.]

12. SEVENTH TRADITION: “According to our Seventh Tradition, we are self-supporting through our own contributions. Our group number is _____. Please use the group number when making your contribution. Expenses are _____, _____, and _____. We send monthly contributions to our intergroup or service board, World Service Office and region to help carry the message to other compulsive overeaters. Give as if your life depends on it! We encourage OA members to give as much as they are able, to help our group be self-supporting. The suggested donation is \$3.00 or more.”

13. OPTIONAL FIVE-OR TEN-MINUTE BREAK:

- Welcome newcomers and visitors.
- Offer Newcomer Packets.
- Draw attention to OA literature and *Lifeline* subscriptions.
- Take time for fellowship.

14. SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR SHARING: [We suggest you read the following before members begin sharing:] “As you share your experience and strength in OA, please also share your hope.

Please confine your sharing to your experience with the disease of compulsive eating, the solution offered by OA and your own recovery from the disease, rather than just the events of the day or week. If you are having difficulties, share how you use the program to deal with them. If you need to talk more about your difficulties and seek solutions, we suggest you speak to your sponsor and other members after the meeting.”

15.

STATE THIS MEETING’S CHOICE: *[Some meetings vary or combine options, as decided by group conscience. Sample options are listed below.]*

Step and Tradition Meetings: “This is a Step meeting. We are studying Step _____ and/or Tradition ____.” *[Leader begins reading from The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous. Members share about the Step or Tradition.]*

Topic Meetings: “This is a topic meeting. Today’s OA program topic is _____.” *[Members are invited to share for three to five minutes on the topic.]*

Speaker Meetings: “This is a speaker meeting.” *[Leader describes his or her story for about 20 minutes and shares experience, strength and hope. Members are invited to share for three to five minutes.]*

Literature Meetings: “This is a literature meeting. Today we are studying _____.” *[Choose from any OA-approved literature. Members may read and share, or read and then share at the end.]*

“Feedback, cross talk and advice-giving are discouraged here. Cross talk during an OA meeting is giving advice to others who have already shared, speaking directly to another person rather than to the group and questioning or interrupting the person speaking/sharing at the time.

“We ask everyone to respect our group conscience. This meeting has decided that the chair for each meeting has the discretion to suggest to anyone sharing that he or she is off topic or is speaking too long. This meeting asks you to accept this suggestion in order to keep the meeting on track.” *[We suggest you add here any other guidelines your group conscience has decided to follow.]*

16.

CLOSING: “By following the Twelve Steps, attending meetings regularly and using the OA tools, we are changing our lives. You will find hope and encouragement in Overeaters Anonymous. To the newcomer, we suggest attending at least six different meetings to learn the many ways OA can help you. The opinions expressed here today are those of individual OA members and do not represent OA as a whole. Please remember our commitment to honor each other’s anonymity. ‘What you hear here, whom you see here, when you leave here, let it stay here.’ Let us all reach out by phone or email to newcomers, returning members and each other. Together we get better.

“Thank you for asking me to be your leader. After a moment of silence, will those of you who wish please join us in _____.” *[Closing of your choice. The 1993 Business Conference suggests that meetings be closed with the Serenity Prayer, the Seventh-Step Prayer, the Third-Step Prayer, or the OA Promise “I Put My Hand in Yours.”]*

OA Board-approved.
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The Tools of Recovery (abridged)

We use tools—a plan of eating, sponsorship, meetings, the telephone, writing, literature, action plan, anonymity and service—to help us achieve and maintain abstinence and recover from our disease. Many of us have found we cannot abstain from compulsive eating unless we use some or all of OA’s nine tools of recovery to help us practice the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

A Plan of Eating

A plan of eating helps us abstain from compulsive eating. (See the pamphlet *Dignity of Choice*.) This tool helps us deal with the physical aspects of our disease and achieve physical recovery.

Sponsorship

We ask a sponsor to help us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. Find a sponsor who has what you want and ask that person how he or she is achieving it.

Meetings

Meetings give us an opportunity to identify our common problem, confirm our common solution through the Twelve Steps and share the gifts we receive through this program. In addition to face-to-face meetings, OA offers telephone and online meetings.

Telephone

Many members call, text or email their sponsors and other OA members daily. Telephone or electronic contact also provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we may experience.

Writing

Putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them.

Literature

We read OA-approved books, pamphlets and *Lifeline* magazine. Reading literature daily reinforces how to live the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Action Plan

An action plan is the process of identifying and implementing attainable actions that are necessary to support our individual abstinence. Just like our plan of eating, it may vary widely among members and may need to be adjusted to bring structure, balance and manageability into our lives.

Anonymity

Anonymity guarantees we will place principles before personalities and assures us that only we have the right to make our membership known within our community. Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication means that we never allow our faces or last names to be used once we identify ourselves as OA members.

Within the Fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there.

Service

Any form of service that helps reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Members can give service by getting to meetings, putting away chairs, putting out literature and talking to newcomers. Beyond the group level, a member can serve as intergroup representative, committee chair, region representative or Conference delegate.

As OA's responsibility pledge states: "Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this, I am responsible."

See the full *Tools of Recovery* pamphlet for more information.



Our invitation to you

We of Overeaters Anonymous have made a discovery. At the very first meeting we attended, we learned that we were in the clutches of a dangerous illness, and that willpower, emotional health and self-confidence, which some of us had once possessed, were no defense against it.

We have found that the reasons for the illness are unimportant. What deserves the attention of the still-suffering compulsive overeater is this: there is a proven, workable method by which we can arrest our illness.

The OA recovery program is patterned after that of Alcoholics Anonymous. We use AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, changing only the words "alcohol" and "alcoholic" to "food" and "compulsive overeater."

As our personal stories attest, the Twelve-Step program of recovery works as well for compulsive overeaters as it does for alcoholics.

Can we guarantee you this recovery? The answer is simple. If you will honestly face the truth about yourself and the illness; if you will keep coming back to meetings to talk and listen to other recovering compulsive overeaters; if you will read our literature and that of Alcoholics Anonymous with an open mind; and, most important, if you are willing to rely on a power greater than yourself for direction in your life, and to take the Twelve Steps to the best of your ability, we believe you can indeed join the ranks of those who recover.

To remedy the emotional, physical and spiritual illness of compulsive overeating we offer several suggestions, but keep in mind that the basis of the program is spiritual, as evidenced by the Twelve Steps.

We are not a "diet and calories" club. We do not endorse any particular plan of eating. We practice abstinence by staying away from eating between planned meals and from all individual binge foods. Once we become abstinent, the preoccupation with food diminishes and in many cases leaves us entirely. We then find that, to deal with our inner turmoil, we have to have a new way of thinking, of acting on life rather than reacting to it—in essence, a new way of living.

From this vantage point, we begin the Twelve-Step program of recovery, moving beyond the food and the emotional havoc to a fuller living experience. As a result of practicing the Steps, the symptom of compulsive overeating is removed on a daily basis, achieved through the process of surrendering to something greater than ourselves; the more total our surrender, the more fully realized our freedom from food obsession.

Here are the Steps as adapted for Overeaters Anonymous:

1. We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

“But I’m too weak. I’ll never make it!” Don’t worry, we have all thought and said the same thing. The amazing secret to the success of this program is just that: weakness. It is weakness, not strength, that binds us to each other and to a Higher Power and somehow gives us the ability to do what we cannot do alone.

If you decide you are one of us, we welcome you with open arms. Whatever your circumstances, we offer you the gift of acceptance. You are not alone any more. Welcome to Overeaters Anonymous. Welcome home!

Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by AA World Services, Inc.

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The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television, and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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