

INTRODUCTION

Study and Practice

How can we alcoholics in recovery live *happy, joyous, and free?* (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 133: 0)

Alcoholics Anonymous is the life changing program formed by two desperate alcoholics in 1935. In the Big Book, as the text *Alcoholics Anonymous* is known, we read the written words of the first 100 men and women of AA as they were put in the way of a spiritual awakening. Where did their words come from? What were their practices of the day by day disciplines that became the 12 Steps? How did they do it?

The Steps are suggested guides for recovery. There is no rule that says anyone has to do them, and there is no regulation about how they should be done. This Steps by the Big Book workbook is for those who *are willing to grow along spiritual lines* (60: 1) by studying the first 103 pages of the Big Book while actually doing the Steps. Our goal is to study the Steps as a friendly, focused group, and work them as the authors of the Big Book described. We wish to make the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous part of our lives by collaborating with a power greater than ourselves – an inner knowing, our own best and highest nature. To this end we ask ourselves two primary questions:

-What do the Big Book authors say about the Steps?

-What does the Big Book say to each one of us about our own real practice of the Steps?

Some of us in the recovering community in the Brattleboro, Vermont, area found that we did better studying the Big Book as a group rather than on our own. It is our belief that the only wrong way to work the Steps is alone. Together we can do it! The work of this group study supports the pass-it-on process of one alcoholic talking with another. This manual is for those in recovery who want to go through the Steps again; or freshen up on their Steps prior to working with a sponsee; or for sponsors and sponsees who want to progress through the Steps together. The only requirements are to show up, study the Big Book, and do each Step. This guide comes from these experiences. This is an introduction to the spiritual riches of the Big Book's directions to the 12 Steps. We hope this guide is useful throughout recovery, whether one is working the Steps for the

first time, or has followed the Steps for many years. Perhaps your group may craft its own manual, the better to reflect the warmth and strength of the safe haven found in the 12 Steps. If appropriate, simply say your own addiction in place of alcohol.

Your Group

Please be aware that everything in this workbook comes from our experience, strength, and hope. Every process and suggestion in this workbook is optional.

Our Steps by the Big Book group sessions are not official AA meetings because we limit enrollment to a specific number of participants.

- Your group can be of any size or composition. An even number of participants, perhaps from 2 to 16, allows members of the group to work in pairs as “buddies.” A group may be simply one sponsor and one sponsee.
- Agree on a purpose, plan and session format of the Steps by the Big Book group, and that in general the group will stick to the schedule.
- Agree that each member attends every session if possible, commits to read the text and respond to the session questions, and in fact DOES each Step as it is encountered. (Fifth Steps are not shared at the sessions.)
- Agree that each member of the group contacts one or more members (buddies) and/or a sponsor regularly between sessions.
- Agree that group members can expect to spend at least as much time on reading, writing and contact with buddies between sessions as in group time.
- Agree on a date by which participants may leave or new members may join the group after it begins.
- Agree that group members will not drink or use during the course.

Group Norms

While there are no rules in AA, there are written Traditions and unwritten norms (i.e. identifying oneself as an alcoholic in meetings). In order to ensure that your group runs smoothly, we suggest considering these questions:

- Will start and end times for the sessions be honored?
- Will one group member chair the entire process, or will group members take turns chairing the sessions?
- Will absolute confidentiality about the group be practiced?
- Will readings be read at the sessions, or should the readings be completed in advance?
- Is each group member expected to speak and share personal writings at group sessions? (It is suggested that members do their Fifth Step outside of the sessions with a sponsor or buddy.)

- Will group members consider not speaking a second time until all have had a chance to share first?
- Will someone serve as a friendly timekeeper?

Working with a Sponsor or Buddy

Our group experience has shown that it is useful for group members to work closely with one or more members of the group (“buddies”), in a manner that compliments working with a sponsor.

The support and stimulus of working the Steps with a buddy, a sponsor, or both, leads to personal growth and change. We read the Big Book chapters or selections together. Together, we work on our reflections and writings about the focus questions and inventories. Together we get and give support for this process of working the Steps, and for sharing our discoveries, doubts and experiences in the group.

How a Session May Go

Typically we read the session material on our own and write our responses.

This is a team effort. We meet as a committed group of equals once or twice a week, or as the group sees fit. We open with a time of quiet, followed by a very brief check-in as to how each member is doing with studying and working the Steps. We read selections from the Big Book on a particular Step, and then for 10 minutes or so one group member speaks of her or his personal experience doing this Step by the Big Book. Every member then shares their writings or reflections on that session’s Step work. Discussion is encouraged, as long as we speak out of our own experience. Some groups choose to expand or contract the session material, or take a short break after working Step 4. We may close with reciting the Step and a meditation or prayer.

Guide to This Guide

Our reference for this study of the 12 Steps is the first 103 pages of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, fourth edition, *the basic text* (xi: 2) for the program and fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. The notations are to page and paragraph, as in (64: 0, 1), i.e. (64)

page 64; (: 0) the partial paragraph at the top of the page; (1) the first full paragraph on that page; etc. Quotes from the Big Book are in *italics*.

Please ignore anything in the group sessions or this handbook that you feel contradicts what you find in the Big Book.

As a study group we will cover:

Preface and Forewords	
“Doctor’s Opinion”	Step 1.
Chapter 1. Bill’s Story	Step 1
Chapter 2. There Is a Solution	Steps 1 and 2
Chapter 3. More About Alcoholism	Steps 1 and 2
Chapter 4. We Agnostics	Step 2
Chapter 5. How It Works	Steps 3 and 4
Chapter 6. Into Action	Steps 5 through 11
Chapter 7. Working With Others	Step 12

In the Steps by the Big Book sessions, we read paragraph by paragraph. We pause at commas and stop at periods. We turn the declarative statements of the Big Book into questions to ourselves. We constantly ask: “What does this mean for me in my life?” These inquiries become prompts to questions we may explore with others.

In essence, this manual is a cut and paste scrapbook of pithy suggestions – concise and helpful insights that can have an immediate effect on how we study and work the Steps. The session material is drawn from the Big Book, and AA literature, such as *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12&12)*, with focus questions and comments borrowed verbatim without attribution from meetings, others in recovery, and from several published and recorded recovery sources. Any errors that appear in this guide belong to those of us who compiled it.

This workbook is divided into three parts: Part I covers Steps 1, 2 and 3; Part II examines Step 4; Part III looks into Steps 5 through 12. Each part begins with notes on aspects of the Steps in question. Outlined points of reflection follow. Optional material and sample definitions are in brackets [...]. Finally, there are worksheets that are intended to help you focus your writing on each Step. On the following pages you will find the basic workbook session outline and an optional group session format.

Steps by the Big Book typical session outline

I ON YOUR OWN: STUDY – What did the Big Book authors say?

- **READ** - Individually, and with your sponsor or other group members, study the suggested readings for the Step you are working on.
- **WRITE** - We suggest one or two 15-20 minute writing sessions per day.
 - Write of your own experience working the Step under consideration. Respond to the issues the readings raise for you.
 - Reflect on the focus points in each session and think about writing on three or four, or all of them, as you see fit.
 - Cross off the bulleted focus and reflection comments as you come to them. Try reading them out loud to help make them stick.
 - Consider completing the worksheets intended to build on what the Big Book says about the practice of each Step.
- **TALK** - Meet with one or more other members of the group or with your sponsor or both to discuss the readings and your written reflections on them.
- **PRACTICE DAILY MEDITATION / PRAYER** - Strive to develop a daily practice of quiet centering before reading and writing. Use whatever meditations or prayers are meaningful to you. [See p.13: 4 and Step 11, pp. 85-88]

II WITH THE GROUP: PRACTICE – What does the Big Book say to me about my own practice of this Step?

- Reflect together in depth about your own life practices of really doing the Step in question as illuminated by the Big Book.
- Share what you have written.

III DAILY PRACTICE OF 12 STEP PRINCIPLES

Consider your personal daily practice of the principles of the relevant Step.

IV TAKE THE STEP

Since the way people take the Steps in AA is highly personal, we leave it to individual members to decide when they have taken each Step. The Big Book has us consider, *Is our [Step] work solid so far? Can we answer to our satisfaction?* (75: 03-76: 1)

For group purposes, some observe completing each Step by joining hands and reciting the Step, along with selected meditations or prayers.

Example of Steps by the Big Book Group Session Format

(This optional schedule is for a 1½ hour session once a week, or as the group sees fit. You may adjust the length of the session to 2 or more hours, add breaks, etc.)

- **Open on time with from 1 to 5 minutes or more of centering silence, with focus meditation or prayer such as the Third Step prayer.**

- **First 2 min. Review agenda for this session.**

- **Approximate group study and practice times:**
 - **10 min.: 30 second check-ins around the group.**
 - **15 min.: Review selections from the reading.**
 - **15 min.: Chairperson or a designated group member each session may share their experience with this reading and this Step according to the Big Book.**
 - **40 min. Discussion. (40 min. per 1½ hour session. 70 min. per 2 hour session, etc.): Group may share writings and talk about questions and worksheets on actually working this Step by the Big Book.**

- **Last 3 min. Review next session's agenda.**
 - **Encourage reading and writing between sessions.**
 - **Urge meeting with one's buddy and/or sponsor.**

- **Close on time with meditation or prayer such as the Seventh Step prayer.**
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Groups often hold one session each week through five or six months.

Optional schedule for two sessions +/- done at each weekly gathering over three months:

- Week 1: Introduction & Step 1 (Sessions 1 & 2)
- Week 2: Step 1 (Sessions 3, 4 & 5)
- Week 3: Step 2 (Session 6)
- Week 4: Step 3 (Session 7)
- Week 5: Step 4 Resentments (Sessions 8 & 9)
- Week 6: Step 4 Fears & Relationships/Sex (Sessions 10 & 11)
- Week 7: Step 4 Review & Step 5 (Sessions 12 & 13)
- Week 8: Step 6 & Step 7 (Sessions 14 & 15)
- Week 9: Step 8 & Step 9 (Sessions 16 & 17)
- Week 10: Step 10 & Step 11 (Sessions 18 & 19)
- Week 11: Step 12 (Session 20)