

Members have a responsibility to the group. Just as you would not choose a sponsor actively involved in inner circle behavior, group members bristle at receiving uncomfortable suggestions from someone lacking the willingness to put substantial sober time together.

Groups are sometimes in danger of becoming codependent. If all group members have trouble getting sober, then one's sense of accountability toward the group is weakened. For example, why should one make an effort not to masturbate if all of your feedback members do it?

Some choose group therapy led by a trained professional over SAA feedback groups due to lack of time or because adding another group would detract from other commitments such as work, relationships and service.

## Testimonials

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Some SAA members describe how a feedback group supports their recovery:

- “My feedback group knows me and they can tell when I am off track. They witness me in a way that I can't get anywhere else. They also provide a level of feedback about all aspects of my life – not just program. At this point, it is the cornerstone of my recovery.”
- “...after 5 years, these guys know my BS and can call me on it.”
- “It's a group that's known me over the long haul, knows my issues, helps me focus on areas I'm struggling with and gives me kudos when they see improvements. It's also another support system in addition to my sponsor, where I

can also talk about other areas of life in addition to recovery.”

- “The group knows me very well and knows how to both support me and how to help me spot old trouble areas. It is also a place to check in middle circle stuff very explicitly. Being in a feedback group for me is a way to commit more deeply to SAA.”
- “They point out my patterns of behavior over time so I can see if I'm being delusional or acting from my addiction. They give me praise when I make progress working my program.”
- “They know me more than my sponsor does. They remember the smallest things that really helps me in my recovery.”
- “...a safe place to talk in detail about things I couldn't necessarily share at group level. The consistent support ... they have become my closest friends. It takes the concept of fellowship and puts it into hyper space.”
- “Probably the most important recovery relationship after my sponsor. ...Sometimes they point out my weaknesses that I am unaware of, other times they point out my strengths that I am unaware of, other times it is just nice to be able to talk and be heard and have that reflected back to me. Often when my own words are reflected back to me, I hear better what I am saying.”
- “... an outside perspective from a group that cares about my recovery and that I trust.”
- “... provide deeper and more varied examples of experience, strength and hope.”
- “They hold me accountable for my actions and for any promises I make. I also hear their nagging voices in my head whenever I'm straying from the path.”

Bay Area Intergroup of SAA

## Feedback Groups

### HOW TO START ONE, JOIN ONE OR MAINTAIN ONE

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## About Feedback Groups

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A feedback group can be a very effective tool for supporting the sobriety of a sex addict in recovery.

A feedback group usually meets weekly and consists of four to six SAA members who support each other on an ongoing basis by listening to each other's issues and providing direct feedback.

A feedback group features controlled crosstalk in a private, closed group.

Attendance is typically limited to long-term, stable members. The group typically meets in its members' homes and is not listed in the regional meeting list.

In contrast, a 12-Step meeting has no crosstalk, an open, fluid membership and meets in public spaces which are formally listed in a meeting schedule.

### A feedback group offers:

- Trusted confidants and a safe, private space that engenders deeper **intimacy** encouraging detailed, rigorously honest conversation about experiences and challenges in the addict's life.
- A **range of** useful, caring **viewpoints** for any issue that one can evaluate and integrate in sobriety.
- Increased **accountability**.
- **Continuity** that allows members to familiarize themselves with each other's issues and provide ongoing support.

## Group Formats

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Group formats vary with the needs and desires of members and often evolve over time.

### A sample group format:

1. Serenity prayer
2. 3-5 minute meditation
3. Each member may have up to six minutes of uninterrupted sharing, and might conclude with a request for feedback on specific issues.
4. Two to three minutes of feedback or all members pool their feedback.
5. Then, move to the next member and repeat the process.
6. Sometimes, each member has two minutes to summarize insights and check out.
7. Closing prayer.

## Qualities of Useful Feedback

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Practical suggestions which communicate empathy and understanding, acknowledge member's struggles, validate successes and growth and identify red flags such as backsliding or a lack of willingness. The feedback can refer to program tools, personal experience and the member's behavior patterns to provide context and a larger perspective.

A timekeeper keeps the process focused, structured and on track.

Members may bring a topic outline to discuss during check-in. Likewise, members may take notes during a share to jog their memory during response time.

## Starting or Joining a Feedback Group

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Identify SAA members to include people you relate to, whose program work you respect, or during your meetings' business announcements, announce that you are starting one or wanting to join one, and see who responds.

Length of sobriety matters less than willingness to recover. Sometimes people form a group around recovering from a common inner circle behavior but that is the exception.

It only takes three members, but we have found that four or five is optimal.

Some groups, upon forming or when welcoming a new member, ask the prospective member to read his/her first step as a way to understand that person's history and inner circle behaviors.

Sometimes a group "auditions" a new member on a pilot basis to see if it's a good fit.

Some groups work the steps together, using the group for informal co-sponsorship.

### Things to consider:

A feedback group is one tool in a program of recovery, not recovery itself. It cannot replace meetings, sponsorship, step work, program literature, prayer, meditation and spiritual development as a whole. A feedback group should complement all of these practices.

Every relationship dynamic that exists in life may be present in a feedback group, and so it can be practice for communicating in one's larger life.