

# OUTREACH CALLS

## *Why they are important and suggestions for making and receiving them*

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Together with meetings, sponsorship, reliance on our Higher Power and providing service, outreach calls are a fundamental tool for successfully working the SLAA Twelve Step program. Making outreach calls to fellow members in the program helps us break our isolation, relieve our feelings of loneliness, and helps us create or maintain a solid foundation of sobriety. Some experienced members in recovery recommend that all members, especially newcomers, make two to three outreach calls a day.

By making and taking outreach calls we learn a variety of lessons and skills that are critical to establishing long-term sobriety:

- How to ask for help.
- We learn that we are not alone.
- How to uncover, acknowledge, honor, and communicate our feelings
- How to become aware of our need for boundaries, how to set them, how to keep them and how to honor and respect the boundaries set by others.
- The important skill of active listening, which we define as being present to what the person speaking is saying and avoiding distractions.
- We learn that sometimes all we need is to be heard and not judged or given advice.

Outreach calls to fellow sobriety members are important for both the caller and the person receiving the call. Please do not feel like you are bothering someone by phoning them. Other members can set their own boundaries when receiving calls. Your outreach may also help another.

It is also important for newcomers to understand that outreach calls are not the same as calls to family and friends, where oftentimes we do not practice vulnerability and honesty about our sex and love patterns and behaviours. The purpose of outreach calls is to give us the opportunity to connect with ourselves, another person and our higher power, rather than an opportunity to “visit” or “catch up”. This difference is what makes them fundamental to our recovery.

Outreach calls are also different from calls to a sponsor. While a sponsor is a spiritual guide who helps a member work through the Steps, an outreach

fellow member can be anyone who is working the SLAA program, whether they are a newcomer or someone who has been working the Steps for awhile. This document provides suggested guidelines specifically for member-to-member calls, not sponsor-sponsee calls.

At some meetings, fellow members are asked whether they are willing to take outreach calls from newcomers. Trust that if they have raised their hand they will return your call as promptly as possible – if they are unable to initially – accept it. Sometimes you will have to call a member more than once. Some members may not be available or ever reply. Do not take this personally; embrace it as an opportunity for growth. We recommend gravitating towards members who are available and who do reply. Don't be afraid to continue to ask for help. If there's someone you have been particularly inspired by at a meeting, you can approach them directly and ask if it's okay to call them.

*Outreach call etiquette is important in order to practice respectful and safe interactions.*

### **Outreach calls are:**

- An opportunity to connect with fellow members and practice building healthy relationships.
- An opportunity to support each other through recovery, especially during withdrawal and other situations where we feel triggered and have an impulse to act out.
- An opportunity to learn how to work the program from someone with more sobriety, if both people wish to share.
- An opportunity to share the progress we have made and our signs of recovery.
- An opportunity to build accountability as you work the program.
- A reminder that we are not alone.

### **Outreach calls are not:**

- A one-way monologue or an excuse for dumping. Dumping is toxic for both the person making the call and the person receiving it. Both people need to share when possible.
- A therapy session. It is not your job to “fix” or rescue anyone.
- A replacement for going to meetings or calling a sponsor.
- Necessarily lengthy; five to 10 minutes is acceptable.

As the initiator of the call, it is important to ask if you've phoned the receiver at a good time and what their time availability is. Outreach calls do not need to take a significant amount of time to be effective.

As the receiver, here are some sample dialogue suggestions:

- "I have about ten minutes; maybe you can share for five and I can share for five. Will that work for you?" (Identify the amount of time you have)
- "I only have a few minutes now but I can talk more at..." (Specify the time)
- "I only have a few minutes. How can I best support you now with the time I have?"
- Would you like feedback or would you like for me to just listen?

During an outreach call you are **not responsible** for:

- Finding solutions to another person's problems.
- Finding answers to their questions if you don't know them already.
- Giving more time or energy than you have available.

For both the initiator and the receiver of an outreach call, here are some ways you can be of service, whether you have a lot of experience in the program or in working the 12 Steps, or not:

- **Listening:** Listening is as important as talking. We each need to be heard. If we don't have much time or we are unable to give feedback for whatever reason (i.e. we may be in a loud place or we may not have the desire to talk, but are able to listen) we can ask the caller if we can provide service by listening. Listening is not only an opportunity to learn something new or to be reminded of our own journey in the program – by listening, we are doing service to another person's recovery.
- **Mirroring:** Mirror feedback is relating back what you have heard. Here is where active listening becomes a vital tool. It may seem simple but, as addicts, we are often not used to active listening. By mirroring, we learn to stay present and listen in order to mirror back what we've heard. Mirror feedback can be an eye-opener to the one who receives it, helping us understand our thought patterns and the extent of our addiction.

- **Relating:** Relating feedback is providing examples of how we relate to what we have heard. It doesn't have to be an exact parallel to the story we've heard. If a caller is describing a relationship with a son, we can relate to it by describing a relationship to a brother or a qualifier, if we feel it's appropriate to the share. In relating we must be cautious not to hijack the focus of the share onto us and our story.
- **Suggestions:** Do not give suggestions or advice unless it's asked for or before you ask permission to give it, i.e.: "Do you want feedback?" and/or "May I make a suggestion?" Suggestions are given by providing program tools to face the situation (e.g., working the Steps, prayer/meditation, more outreach calls, more meetings, consulting one's sponsor, surrendering to your Higher Power, or by putting the issue in a God box, etc).

**Interrupting** may also be an important and healthy part of making and taking outreach calls. It is acceptable to interrupt someone and let them know when your time is up, and you need to go. It is helpful to wait for an appropriate pause, but that may not always occur. Therefore, it is important to interrupt as respectfully and politely as possible.

Interrupting may also be important and healthy when a fellow member seems to be stuck in their story or the problem (they said this, he/she did that) and they can't see, or are not willing to see, the solution.

Finally, interrupting may also be important when something the other fellow member has said is triggering to your sobriety and recovery. For example, inappropriate or overly detailed descriptions of sexual acts.

SLAA is a solution-focused program. We are not a self-help or support group. We focus on working the Twelve Steps in order to achieve sobriety from our sex and love addiction.

*Do not take it personally if someone doesn't have much time to talk, doesn't take your call, or doesn't call you back. Keep phoning other members, keep going to meetings and keep working the program. It will strengthen your recovery from your sex and love addiction, and you will find the peace, serenity and joy you desire.*

*You are not alone anymore.*