



Chronic Pain Anonymous Meeting Handbook



*“... a fellowship for those with
chronic pain and chronic illness.”*

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Welcome

Welcome to Chronic Pain Anonymous! We hope you find the serenity and happiness many have found in our fellowship.

The Chronic Pain Anonymous (CPA) fellowship is guided by the Twelve Traditions. They embody spiritual principles that ensure the survival of CPA, just as the Twelve Steps are based on spiritual principles that promote individual recovery. This handbook is designed to give new groups guidance needed for starting a CPA meeting and offers suggested guidelines for meetings as well as the materials and tools needed to nurture a CPA meeting.

There are three sections. The first, "Starting a CPA Meeting," will help you plan and begin a meeting in your community. The second, "Meeting Resources," contains all the information you need to run a group. The last section, "Meeting Administration," has all the business-related details for CPA meetings. We hope this Handbook will be helpful as you begin a group and move forward in your recovery journey.

Tradition Three states: "The only requirement for CPA membership is a desire to recover from the emotional and spiritual debilitation of chronic pain and chronic illness." The primary purpose of a CPA group is to carry the message of recovery to the person who lives with chronic pain and chronic illness.

Recovery in CPA is defined as the ability to live peacefully, joyfully, and comfortably with ourselves and others. We practice our program by giving away what we have received. By carrying the message of recovery to others, through our meetings, we maintain our own recovery.

We welcome you to CPA, a worldwide fellowship. You are not alone; there are others who understand the isolation, fear, and despair many have experienced when living with unpredictable and life-changing chronic illness and chronic pain. We hope that by following the program steps, principles, and tools, you will find the joy, hope, and happiness we have found.

It is our hope that this guide will make it easy for you to establish a CPA meeting. If you have any questions not answered by the Handbook, please contact us by email at meeting@chronicpainanonymous.org. You can also find information on the CPA website at www.chronicpainanonymous.org. If you prefer, you can write to us at:

Chronic Pain Anonymous Service Board
8924 E. Pinnacle Peak Road, Suite G5-628
Scottsdale, AZ 85255

Starting a CPA Meeting

Introduction

Tradition One of CPA tells us that “personal recovery depends upon CPA unity.” It is in our group meetings where we see the tangible expression of that unity. In the group, we learn to be honest with one another, to share our concerns, and to respond to the needs of others. Together we find a spiritual solution to living with chronic pain and chronic illness. In Tradition Five, we read, “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to people living with chronic pain and chronic illness.” We carry the message when we work the Twelve Steps, observe the Traditions, and share our experience, strength, and hope.

A group is composed of two or more people whose purpose is a desire to recover from the effects of chronic pain and chronic illness. Tradition Three reminds us: “The only requirement for CPA membership is a desire to recover from the emotional and spiritual debilitation of chronic pain or chronic illness.” Thus, a CPA meeting is open to anyone who lives with chronic pain or chronic illness. In our meetings, we are accepted and loved, no matter what our physical condition. Many of us find that regular attendance leads to friendships. Our readings of the Steps, the Traditions, and the Preface support a sense of CPA unity, as called for in Tradition One. There are no dues or fees to attend.

All groups understand that they will abide by the CPA Twelve Traditions and not affiliate with or endorse any outside entity, organization or treatment program.

Meetings are held once a week, at the same place, day, and time, and are generally 60 minutes long. Weekly meetings give everyone an opportunity to share how they are working the program and applying it in their lives.

When considering starting a meeting, you may want to invite others to share the work with you. You can also ask for help from allies, such as clergy, medical professionals, and mental health counselors. The CPA Meeting Liaison is also available to answer questions and support your efforts to carry the message of hope and recovery. You can reach the Liaison at meeting@chronicpainanonymous.org.

At first, only a few people might attend, so you need to be committed to showing up each week until the group begins to grow. Some groups may struggle for the first year, so it helps if you find one or two others who are also committed to attending the meetings and working the Steps.

If you are unfamiliar with CPA or Twelve Step recovery, it is recommended you first attend some meetings before you start a new group. We have found it helpful to attend CPA meetings, whether in person, online, or by telephone or video chat. You will find the meeting information on the CPA website. You will learn a lot from a meeting that is already established, and you will get support and ideas for the new meeting you are creating.

It is not unusual for someone who has not completed working the Twelve Steps to start a meeting. For groups that have more newcomers than longtime members, we suggest that the group study the CPA literature together.

Literature is a direct link to the experience, strength, and hope of members of CPA. We suggest you obtain CPA literature to distribute to get the word out about your meeting. On the CPA website, you can purchase color brochures or download and print black-and-white versions for free. Brochures can be found on the website under "Meeting Resources" and in the CPA store. Newcomer Packets are also available in the CPA website's store; these can be used to welcome new members.

People often have one group that is their "Home Group," where they accept service work responsibilities and often develop close friendships, and where they become involved in the business of the meeting. However, many CPA members attend more than one meeting and sustain a number of relationships within the fellowship.

Electronic Meetings (Online, Telephone, Video, Chat)

There is great value for CPA members to have access to meetings in which they do not have to leave their home. CPA offers meetings online, by telephone, and by video chat, giving everyone access to a CPA meeting, no matter where they live. If you start an electronic meeting, be sure to register with CPA and abide by the Traditions.

Find a Meeting Place

When you are starting a meeting in your area, the first thing you will need to do is find a meeting place. When you are choosing a meeting place, some things you may want to consider are whether handicapped parking is available and if there is overall ease of accessibility—for example, some members may need ramps, wide doors, or special bathroom facilities.

You need a quiet, private meeting place. To find a meeting place, check out churches, temples, community centers, healthcare sites, colleges, or places

where other Twelve Step meetings are held. You can be creative in finding a location.

Each group is self-supporting, so be sure that your group donates something to the facility, even if the facility doesn't ask for rent.

Be sure to post a sign outside the meeting each week so it is easy to find.

Day and Time

It is best to find a day and time that are good for you so you can commit to attending regularly. You will need to determine what time of day is best for you.

Open or Closed Meeting

An open meeting is one that welcomes anyone interested in learning about CPA. Attendees are not required to be a person who lives with chronic pain and chronic illness. Observers are asked to abide by the principles of confidentiality and anonymity to protect the members.

A closed meeting is only for those who live with chronic pain and chronic illness, thus giving everyone attending the freedom to share and listen safely. A closed meeting may decide at times to make the meeting open so anyone interested can learn more about CPA.

Group Name

The group name should be appropriate for your meeting and can reflect the theme or focus of the group, or it can include the meeting's city, day, or time, or it can be a slogan or a program phrase (for example, "One Day at a Time Chronic Pain Anonymous Meeting"). CPA discourages affiliating a group with outside enterprises by incorporating the name of the facility where the meeting is held (for example, "Springfield General Hospital Chronic Pain Anonymous Meeting").

It is helpful if the name is inviting to newcomers. Tradition Eleven says, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television, film, and the Internet." It is suggested we don't promote any other group in the name, as it should not imply affiliation with any other organization, philosophy, religion, or outside enterprise. An ideal group name is reflective of CPA principles and is not offensive or confusing.

Meeting Resources

Meeting Format

The meeting format includes the structure and recovery topics highlighted by the group. It is strongly recommended that the group keeps the meeting focused on the Steps, Traditions, and principles and tools of the program of CPA recovery—this keeps our meetings strong. Meetings usually last one hour, and it is important to start and end on time.

We ensure there is a clear, consistent, and focused message of recovery by using CPA approved literature. In keeping with the Twelve Traditions, use of CPA approved literature in your meeting promotes CPA unity.

Our meetings need to be safe, so we guard our anonymity and confidentiality. In this way, we can share our shame, our denial, and our fears and receive love, acceptance, and support.

Here are some common meeting formats:

Step Study or Tradition Study – Discussions are based on study of the Twelve Steps. The meeting reads from CPA approved literature. One option is for members to take turns reading a paragraph or two, followed by sharing on it, with each person taking a turn reading and sharing. Another option is to read one section of literature and then ask everyone to share on that section. Some Step Study meetings may begin with someone speaking about their experience with the Step chosen for discussion that week. Some groups may follow the same format to study the Twelve Traditions of CPA.

Step and Tradition Study – The meeting studies the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, alternating between Steps and Traditions.

Topic – Meeting discussions are focused on the Twelve Steps or recovery-related topics. Typically a book or piece of CPA literature is read aloud, and a discussion follows. Members can take turns reading and sharing.

Speaker meeting – A meeting features one person's story of recovery. Speakers share their experience, strength, and hope with the group. Depending on the format, the meeting may then open up to include sharing on a topic. In a speaker meeting, a speaker shares his or her experience about their life before they came to CPA, what happened, and what it's like now in their CPA recovery. If the speaker has had other issues in addition to living with chronic pain or chronic illness, they should be asked to focus on their CPA recovery and keep discussion of any other issues to a minimum. The

speaker should be advised of the meeting start time and of the maximum time they are asked to speak. A typical share time for a one-hour meeting is usually ten to fifteen minutes. When the speaker is finished, they are usually asked to choose a topic for discussion that is related to CPA recovery.

Special meetings – These meetings may be made up of a particular group, such as a women’s meeting or a young people’s meeting.

Suggested Meeting Guidelines

Some groups have suggested guidelines for meeting and sharing. Here, we list a few of the guidelines employed by some groups. We recommend that if you use them, keep things *simple and brief*. Remember, there are no requirements in CPA, only suggestions.

- In respect for our members who have sensitivities to odors and scents, please refrain from wearing perfume, cologne, and other scented products to meetings.
- Discussions about specific doctors, medications, therapies, etc. are best left for conversations with a sponsor or other trusted individual. We avoid giving medical advice.
- Sharing a medical history is best kept to general terms, and we avoid discussions of healthcare systems and insurance companies.
- Discussions about a Higher Power or spirituality should not include specifics based in religion.
- We do not have crosstalk in our meetings. (Crosstalk is when one person responds directly, either positively or negatively, to another who has shared.)
- CPA is an anonymous fellowship. Everything that is said in this group must be kept in confidence. Only in this way can we feel free to say what is on our minds and in our hearts.
- Remember that each of us is a person living with pain or illness and, as such, has the right to respect and support.
- If you are new or have any questions, we invite you to stay after the meeting and talk with someone who is familiar with CPA and the Twelve Steps.

Sharing at a Meeting

In our meetings, we speak about our own experiences and listen without comment to what others share. We don't give advice to others. So that our meetings are safe for everyone, we recommend that there is no crosstalk during our meetings. This can include unsolicited feedback, advising, interrogating, criticizing, and referring to someone present by name. Each group may define what it considers crosstalk through a group conscience.

Our sharing is focused on our own experience, strength, and hope and how the program has helped us change our attitudes and actions. We focus on solutions rather than on our difficulties. We protect each other's anonymity: we don't tell the stories of other people, and we don't repeat what we've heard or seen at a meeting. We concentrate on our own feelings and attitudes rather than the details of the situation. We do not discuss other affiliations. We don't discuss religion, we don't criticize, we don't gossip, and we don't share intimate details of our problems. Detailed discussions may occur with our sponsor or privately with another group member.

Anonymity

Tradition Twelve says, "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." This Tradition is a sacred trust and is basic to our fellowship and its survival. It is essential to assure the confidentiality of all who are present and what is shared in a meeting. This principle is honored at all times, both in and outside of the meeting.

According to Tradition Eleven, no one is to use CPA for profit, prestige, or power. No full names or faces are used in press, radio, TV, or the Internet. No member of CPA is an authority. It is a program of principles and not personalities. In no report, meeting minutes, or Board information are full names used.

CPA Approved Literature

To avoid any confusion or any dilution of CPA's message of recovery, we suggest using only CPA approved literature in all our meetings. CPA's books are available for purchase through any book retailer. You can find information about the books on the website. Several other books that have been approved for use in CPA are listed under "Resources" as CPA approved literature. The books and brochures are often used for discussion topics in a meeting.

Meeting Materials

All the suggested materials for use in a meeting are found on the CPA website at "Meeting Materials" under "Resources" (<http://www.chronicpainanonymous.org/meeting-resources/meeting-materials/>). You will find a suggested Preamble, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, the CPA Declaration, One Day at a Time, and suggested meeting formats for face-to-face meetings.

Meeting Administration

Register the Meeting

Because CPA is a fellowship, it is important that all groups register with CPA.

Fill out the online group registration form, "Start a new meeting," which can be found on the CPA website under "Find a Meeting" (<http://www.chronicpainanonymous.org/find-meetings/start-a-new-meeting/>). Your group will be assigned a number and added to the website if you so choose. The members of each meeting can decide if they choose to have the meeting listed on the CPA website. You will be given this option when you fill out the registration form.

If there are any changes, please contact the Meeting Liaison at meeting@chronicpainanonymous.org. It is important that all the information on the website is up to date and that CPA has a contact for your meeting so they can share fellowship news with the group members.

Registering a meeting assures the unity of purpose and the common bond of friendship available to all our members and connects groups in the fellowship so we can communicate with each other. We will need your contact information and, if you are not the Group Representative, we will need the information for that person as well.

Seventh Tradition Financial Responsibilities

As stated in Tradition Seven, all meetings are self-supporting through voluntary contributions. A basket is passed during face-to-face meetings, and the treasurer sends the money to CPA after rent and other expenses are paid. It is suggested that each group send in any funds in excess of a prudent reserve. Each group determines by a group conscience what they believe is a prudent reserve. For many groups, it is often two to three months of group expenses, including rent, literature, and meeting supplies. The group can determine what portion of funds will be sent to support CPA.

CPA electronic meetings often have no expenses. However, it is important to announce CPA's Seventh Tradition at every meeting and either provide the address for members to send in their contributions or refer members to the website to make a contribution. People who attend electronic meetings are encouraged to donate through PayPal, credit card, or debit card on the website at "Contribute to Chronic Pain Anonymous" (<http://>

www.chronicpainanonymous.org/contributions/). They may also mail funds directly to CPA at:

Chronic Pain Anonymous Service Board
8924 E. Pinnacle Peak Road, Suite G5-628
Scottsdale, AZ 85255

If an electronic meeting has an option for members to contribute to the host service, this is not the same as donating to CPA. For such situations, it's a good idea to let participants know where their donations are going. If a meeting is held in a building, we still need to pay our own way; therefore, sometimes a website will charge "rent" for a place on their site. We suggest the meeting chairperson also instruct participants, during the Seventh Tradition announcement, to send their contributions to CPA directly.

The limit for the amount that can be donated by an individual in CPA is US\$3,000 per year.

CPA relies upon its members' contributions to get the word out about CPA recovery. These donations pay for the CPA website, literature publication, and other operational expenses.

Public Outreach

CPA's Eleventh Tradition states, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion." Therefore, you should not pay to advertise or promote your new CPA meeting. But there are other ways you can let the public know. Because the Eleventh Tradition goes on to say, "we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television, film, and the Internet," it's best to use only your first name when distributing literature on behalf of your meeting or speaking for CPA.

To get the word out about your new meeting, you can create a flyer or some type of meeting announcement. We suggest something simple, which includes the location of the meeting, the start date, the meeting time, and any other relevant information, such as room number or directions. There are many places where the flyer can be posted, such as other Twelve Step meeting locations where there's a recovery bulletin board, or the general community bulletin boards found in some libraries and bookstores. Some hospitals, doctors, or pain management programs may give you permission to put a brochure or flyer in their waiting rooms.

You could also visit a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center and let them know about CPA and your new meeting. It's not unusual for some patients to be withdrawing from medications prescribed for chronic pain, so information about CPA could become a vital tool in their ongoing recovery.

Some towns have free Internet classified sites that reach a large readership, and this can be a useful way of getting the word out. You could also try calling the newspapers in your area and ask for the "Calendar" or "Community Events" section. These sections often allow public service announcements or provide free listings to support groups.

Visit the various support groups for conditions such as fibromyalgia, arthritis, lupus, etc. and tell their facilitators about CPA and your new meeting. Perhaps they'll let you speak to their group about your experience with chronic pain and chronic illness and how CPA has helped you. And be sure to announce your new meeting at other CPA meetings you may attend, or you can ask the chairperson to announce your new meeting.

Service Work

Step Twelve tells us, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others with chronic pain and chronic illness, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." One of the best ways to carry the message is to perform service work at some level.

We often take a service position in our Home Group. This is an opportunity for personal growth, and it connects us to each other in new ways.

Each group can determine whether someone has to have completed all the steps for each service position and the length of time they need to be in CPA to perform each position.

Given the limitations of our health conditions, it is often best to concentrate on working one's program in the beginning, until we have some recovery and are able to realistically manage our time and energy. Once our personal recovery is established, we will have maturity in our recovery and may then be ready to be a trusted servant.

Ways to do service work without taking on a specific position can include, but are not limited to:

- being a sponsor or temporary sponsor
- speaking at a CPA meeting

- sharing our story with other members
- attending meetings regularly
- attending CPA business meetings

Within the group meeting, there are a number of positions that may be available, depending on how the group is structured. Anyone who volunteers for a position is a “trusted servant.” We trust that those taking on a position of service will be guided by group conscience, communicate accurately to the group, and help carry the message of recovery. In doing so, they are making a commitment to serve the fellowship of CPA and promote our common welfare.

As trusted servants, we do the will of our Higher Power as discerned by the group conscience, with full responsibility for carrying out the tasks entrusted to us. By doing service work together, we learn to relate to each other on a basis of trust, caring, and selflessness rather than a desire to control. We acknowledge our loving Higher Power as our ultimate authority, and we guard against self-will and pride, which can divide us and obscure our message.

Rotation is the practice of ensuring no one person serves in the same position, thus emphasizing the service itself rather than the person performing the service. We set intervals for service duration. This helps provide diversity in leadership, helps the group stay fresh, ensures no one person has too much influence on the group, and allows others a chance to serve the group.

Service work begins at the group level. Below are descriptions of some of the roles and responsibilities involved in service positions. They are guidelines, and each group can decide to add, delete, or combine as they see necessary.

Secretary/Chairperson/Coordinator – This person takes a leadership role during the meeting and leads the format. They can schedule speakers and decide topics. They guide the meeting according to the Traditions, follow the group format, and keep the meeting moving smoothly. They help everyone keep to the purpose of the meeting, which is to help each other recover from the effects of chronic pain and chronic illness rather than focusing on our conditions.

Contact List Coordinator – Some meetings may also have a list of group members’ contact information. Those who choose to be listed usually provide their first name, phone number, email address, and best time to receive calls. Some meetings also include time zone, city, or state. For reasons of anonymity, only meeting participants have access to the list.

Treasurer – This trusted servant handles the financial affairs of the meeting. Each meeting can have a treasurer who is responsible for the collection and management of the group’s Seventh Tradition donations. This person collects money for the Seventh Tradition and manages the distribution of the funds, including paying rent and reimbursing expenses. They disburse funds as determined by the group conscience, including donating funds to CPA; keep accurate records for the group; and report regularly to the group. A prudent reserve is determined by group conscience. A group first supports itself.

It is highly desirable to keep a simple but formal record of funds received as well as costs and disbursements of monies. This serves as a record to assist each treasurer and as a point of pride to the group with respect to their contributions. A treasurer’s report should be presented on a regular basis; the funds should be distributed on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Group Representative – The primary role of a CPA Group Representative (GR) is to be a trusted servant who functions as a liaison between their CPA group and the CPA fellowship. The GR brings information from their group to the General Advisory Council (GAC) meetings and then reports back to their CPA group an accounting of current CPA issues. The GR represents the voice of the group conscience, reporting the group’s issues to the GAC. This person is a vital link in the continuity, functioning, growth, and unity of CPA as a whole. Each GR is a valuable member of the CPA service structure. Only when a GR keeps the group informed and communicates the group conscience can the GAC truly act for CPA as a whole. The GR keeps the group information accurately registered with CPA.

Any person who has an interest in serving CPA and is willing to represent their CPA group is eligible to be a GR. The GR can be chosen in whatever way works best for each individual group. For communication purposes, the GR will need to have access to email. When a new GR is elected, please contact the CPA Meeting Liaison at meeting@chronicpainanonymous.org to report the change.

Literature Representative – This person makes sure the meeting is supplied with CPA Conference Approved brochures and books and refers newcomers to CPA literature. Newcomers commonly receive a CPA Newcomer Packet (found in the website’s store at <http://www.chronicpainanonymous.org/store/>).

Business Meetings

The purpose of the group business meeting is to conduct the business of the group so it can effectively continue to carry the message of recovery. The meetings can be held monthly or whenever they are needed. Because CPA is a spiritual program, a business meeting should likewise be spiritual. The group conscience is the means to collectively invite the ongoing guidance of a Higher Power in making decisions.

The practice of a group conscience comes from Tradition Two: "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."

Our wisdom derives from the group, not from any individual. Group decisions are guided by our Higher Power and based on spiritual principles rather than personal opinion or power. We keep a spiritual focus so we can find solutions that fulfill the group's needs rather than our personal desires. We listen to each other and find a solution based on our Higher Power's guidance. Discussing and then taking a vote is the mechanism used to make decisions, always striving to keep our minds open.

In the spirit of unity, we find a solution that supports the group, understanding that it is not the will of the group but the will of our Higher Power expressed through the group. It may take time to sift through many different perspectives, or there may be times when consensus comes quickly. We each have a responsibility to play our part in discerning and supporting the group conscience.

This takes time, patience, and goodwill. Love is the force that guides us, not power and control. We learn to trust the group conscience. New challenges may call for new solutions. By practicing the principle of surrender, we can trust that our Higher Power's guidance, as expressed through the group conscience, will take us where we need to be.

It is suggested that groups keep a record of all group conscience decisions.

CPA Organizational Structure

The CPA fellowship is made up of men and women who follow the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of CPA as a way to recover from the debilitating effects of chronic pain and chronic illness. They support each other in their group meetings. Each group is autonomous except in matters that affect other meetings or CPA as a whole. The groups are not legal entities. They are a

diverse group of people, from all walks of life.

A CPA group is defined as two or more people with chronic pain and chronic illness who meet together regularly for the purpose of recovering from the debilitating effects of chronic pain and chronic illness. The group is self-supporting and has no other affiliations. A CPA group is one that has registered with CPA.

The Chronic Pain Anonymous Service Board (CPASB) is a legal entity. It is a non-profit corporation formed under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS. It is able to conduct business on behalf of the CPA fellowship with the financial support of the CPA members and groups, and it is able to provide services to the fellowship and coordinate activities for the fellowship. It is managed by the Board of Trustees.

The General Advisory Council (GAC) meets monthly, and the meetings are open to anyone in the fellowship. The GAC manages the day-to-day operations of CPA. As the fellowship grows, we will expand the service and organizational structure, using the examples of other Twelve Step fellowships as our guide.

Contact CPA

If you wish to contact CPA, your anonymity will be assured. For questions about the CPA program, you can email us on the website contact page: <https://chronicpainanonymous.org/contact-us/>

The mailing address is: Chronic Pain Anonymous Service Board, 8924 E. Pinnacle Peak Road, Suite G5-628, Scottsdale, AZ 85255. Our website is <https://chronicpainanonymous.org>.