

ALL ABOUT SPONSORSHIP

In working the CPA program, it is suggested to have a Sponsor who understands firsthand the emotional and spiritual debilitation of chronic pain and chronic illness. CPA members from other Twelve Step fellowships are encouraged to find a Sponsor in CPA as well. It is our hope that this brochure will be a useful guide to exploring Sponsorship in this program.

What is Sponsorship?

Sponsorship, one member growing in recovery with another, is a core aspect of our program. A Sponsor shares their experience, strength, and hope about how the program helps them live more peacefully, joyfully, and comfortably with chronic pain and chronic illness. The Sponsor's primary responsibility is to work the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts with another member, the Sponsee.

Many of us have difficulty asking for help but asking someone to be our Sponsor *is* an act of self-care. We are not "bothering" another member when we ask them to be our Sponsor.

Acting as a Sponsor is an honor and a privilege. A Sponsor provides a safe space for individuals to be open and honest. A Sponsor is someone we can trust to show us respect, understanding, and compassion.

With our Sponsor, we can share difficulties, situations, and conditions we wouldn't usually share in a meeting and thus learn how to apply our program to challenging circumstances. Sponsors often provide a different perspective and help us see things we can't see in ourselves. With the guidance of a Sponsor, we are more likely to stick with our program and grow in CPA recovery.

When, where, and how to choose a Sponsor

When do I get a Sponsor?

Some consider it important to get a Sponsor as soon as possible, while others prefer to take time to become familiar with members in the fellowship. Although every Sponsorship relationship is unique, certain activities and responsibilities are common. However, there is no “ideal” Sponsor or Sponsee. When choosing a Sponsor, remember that this is not necessarily a lifelong commitment. Some of us change Sponsors. Others keep the same Sponsor throughout their CPA journey.

Why *this* Sponsor?

We choose a Sponsor because they have “something we want.” This means we view their recovery and the way they apply the program in their own life as something we want for ourselves. We approach a member with whom we feel comfortable and safe and ask them to be our Sponsor. Or someone may offer to be our Sponsor; however, we do not have to say yes. We choose our own Sponsor.

What is a good match?

In CPA, we have seen as much success with Sponsorship between two people who are very much alike as with those who are completely different. Some members want a clear delineation between friendship and Sponsorship—others do not. It is strongly suggested that we avoid getting into a relationship that may lead to romantic feelings or sexual attraction. Such attraction can distract from the nature of Sponsorship and interfere with our ability to share honestly.

Going to meetings

At meetings, take some time to observe and reflect on what others share. As you listen, ask yourself, “Is this a person who I relate to when they share? Am I drawn to how they embody serenity and acceptance of their health conditions?” Consider arriving early or staying after the meeting to get to know members and ask for their contact information or if they know anyone who wants to be a Sponsor.

How do I ask?

The process is informal. Some members like to ask right away, while others may feel more comfortable asking about sponsorship after making initial contact. We may begin this conversation by asking, "Do you Sponsor?" or "What is your experience with Sponsorship?" When we are ready, we may ask them to be our Sponsor. There is no rush.

What if I can't find a Sponsor?

Sometimes, it may take time to find a Sponsor. We have faith that our Higher Power will guide us to an appropriate Sponsor or the best type of relationship to foster working the program.

We can ask someone to be a **Temporary Sponsor**. This person is someone with whom we can share our story and who can help us learn about CPA literature, types of meetings, and spiritual principles. They can connect us with other CPA members and assist us in finding a permanent Sponsor.

Some people use the term **Co-Sponsor** to refer to a relationship where two members sponsor each other. Members who want to step away from a hierarchical/traditional relationship may prefer to use terms such as **Fellow Traveler** or **Step Buddy**. This model focuses on two peers who have a desire to work the Twelve Steps together as equals.

Some people choose to work their Steps in **Study Groups**, which can be found on our website or through word of mouth.

In addition, some people find it helpful to choose a **Service Sponsor** specifically for guidance with their service work. They will often work the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service together, referring to *Our Common Welfare* and the *Chronic Pain Anonymous Service Handbook*.

Sometimes, we gather our courage only to have someone say no. Members decline Sponsorship requests for their own reasons that have nothing to do with us personally. When that happens, we keep searching, knowing the right relationship will be revealed in Higher Power's time.

What does the Sponsor do?

Sponsors share their understanding of CPA principles and terminology. They encourage the Sponsee to use the CPA literature and other CPA resources, such as the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts.

To the best of their ability, Sponsors demonstrate:

- using the tools of recovery
- listening with an attitude of humility, kindness, compassion, and respect
- giving their full attention to the Sponsee when they are together
- keeping confidences and respecting anonymity
- remaining objective
- offering ongoing and steady support by highlighting growth in the Sponsee's recovery
- encouraging the Sponsee to seek trustworthy professional help when needed
- trusting the Sponsee's Higher Power when feeling personally powerless

Because everyone in CPA lives with chronic pain and/or chronic illness, it's important for both Sponsor and Sponsee to practice self-care. How will communication work when health conditions impact energy and availability? Clarifying expectations and availability is crucial in building an effective, trusting relationship.

Topics to discuss before working together:

- availability and frequency of communication
- time and duration of Sponsorship meetings (day, time, and how often) methods of contact, such as text, phone, email, in person, etc.
- which CPA resources will be used to begin your work together

What a Sponsor does NOT do

A Sponsor does not:

- give advice
- try to rescue or "fix" the Sponsee
- give harsh or shaming criticism
- share confidences with others

- provide advice on medications, religion, legal matters, or any other form of “professional” advice
- lend money, offer jobs, provide food or housing
- use the relationship for their own inappropriate gain
- neglect their own recovery program to attend to the Sponsee

Sponsors don't force their personal views about anything, including politics, religion, treatments, etc. There is only one authority: a loving Higher Power. Therefore, the Sponsor does not tell the Sponsee what to do or how to respond in any given situation. A Sponsee retains responsibility for making decisions about their lives, including their recovery. A Sponsor is involved but not entangled with the Sponsee.

What are the Sponsee's responsibilities?

To the best of their ability, Sponsees demonstrate:

- practicing humility, kindness, compassion, and respect
- respecting their Sponsor's time and energy
- reaching out to other CPA members for support
- communicating as agreed upon
- giving their full attention to the Sponsor when they are together
- valuing honesty and listening with an open mind
- attending meetings regularly and studying the CPA literature
- practicing the program and applying the principles
- keeping confidences and respecting anonymity
- willingness to sponsor other member(s) and be of service as appropriate

How does Sponsorship help the Sponsor?

We may worry that we are a burden to our Sponsor and hesitate to contact them. But by reaching out to our Sponsor, we are actually helping them in their own recovery journey.

When Sponsors share their experience in recovery, their program grows deeper with increased competence, purpose, and self-worth. This relationship is a gift and privilege. We have a slogan: “You can't keep it unless you give it away.”

How do I end the relationship with my Sponsor?

There are times when we find that our Sponsor has been helpful in our recovery journey, and now we are ready for someone new to be our Sponsor. We are free to select another with whom we feel comfortable and who we believe will help us.

We ask for guidance from our Higher Power before making any such decision. We approach this discussion with honesty and kindness. We let the Sponsor know we have chosen to end our Sponsorship relationship. Although no explanation is necessary, one may wish to communicate the need for a change without simply disappearing. We take full responsibility for our decision.

How do I end a relationship with a Sponsee?

If we can no longer be an effective Sponsor for health or other personal reasons, we may have to end the relationship. We compassionately discuss the matter and can offer to assist our Sponsee in finding a new Sponsor. Most importantly, we practice compassion with ourselves when making these difficult decisions, keeping in mind that part of effective Sponsorship is being a role model for self-care.

Am I ready to be a Sponsor?

We may feel ready to become Sponsors when our perspective that brought us to CPA has changed from obsession, fear, and hopelessness to learning how to live peacefully, joyfully, and comfortably with ourselves and others. This is usually the result of working the Twelve Steps of CPA.

We can seek guidance from our own Sponsor about when we may be ready to take on the responsibility of sponsoring another member.

However, we trust our inner calling to sponsorship as there are no set qualifications. Providing a safe haven for another member is a gift and a privilege.

How many Sponsees can a Sponsor have?

There is no set number. We each do what our energy and time allows. Sometimes we have the capacity for walking more people through the Twelve Steps, and sometimes working with just one Sponsee is enough. It may depend on how we meet with Sponsees, how often, our capacity, time available, and guidance from our Higher Power.

How can my group help with Sponsorship?

Groups can take actions to focus awareness on Sponsorship and assist members in finding a Sponsor. Some ideas to consider:

- Suggest this announcement: "If any person here does not have a Sponsor and wants one, let us know after the meeting."
- Suggest this item be included in the format: "Will everyone who is willing to Sponsor or be a temporary Sponsor identify yourself?"
- Set a time after the meeting for members to ask questions about Sponsorship.
- Schedule business meetings or hosting workshops on the topic of Sponsorship.

What if I can't reach my Sponsor?

There are times when health challenges make it difficult for a Sponsor to be available, so it is important that we have fellowship friends to turn to as a vital part of our recovery program. There will be times when we need support and our Sponsor is unavailable. We do not take our Sponsor's unavailability personally. Instead, we can find a meeting to attend, or we can read CPA literature, reach for our contact list, or rely on our Higher Power.

Books and brochures can provide guidance and support in times of need. We remember that in our spiritual program of recovery, no one is alone. Our Higher Power is always available to us. Remember we are "Higher Power reliant, not Sponsor reliant."

Voices of Our Members

After about a month of going to meetings I reached out and got a temporary Sponsor. He was so open and willing to help, and I was proud of myself for having the courage to be open myself. Shortly after we started talking, life got busy, and my temporary Sponsor and I stopped talking. Instead of being discouraged and hurt I was understanding and compassionate. I knew that finding the right Sponsor was going to be a challenge and I was ready to accept that.

I continued to attend meetings and I soon found myself reaching out again. Thankfully, my courage paid off and I was met with another "yes." I am really looking forward to working the twelve steps of CPA with my new Sponsor and continuing to grow and learn in CPA.



When I joined CPA, I was in a state of crisis. I had been given the gift of desperation. My illness had not only affected my body, but it was corroding my confidence, as well. The isolation was taking its toll on my ego. I felt fragile and small. I needed to get in touch with a sense of purpose. I knew that I needed help, but my fragile ego wasn't sure if I could handle the humility required to ask someone to be my Sponsor.

Then one summer day a CPA member encouraged me. She pointed outside and said, "It's 95 degrees out there. I could probably walk barefoot across that parking lot, if I wanted to. But why would I do that if I have the comfort of shoes? The same thing is true of the Steps. I could probably do the steps by myself, but if I could do it with the added comfort and encouragement of a Sponsor, why go it alone?"



Part of the CPA's Step One is the humility found in both admitting my personal powerlessness over chronic pain and illness AND asking someone directly for help. I cheat myself out of its full freedom if I do not directly ask someone to Sponsor me.

After 30 years in three Twelve Step Programs, having had many Sponsors, it still took every ounce of courage I could summon to ask in CPA. I never want to ask for help. I always feel vulnerable, ripe for rejection. Even after Sponsoring countless people and knowing the personal benefits, I still feel like I am bothering someone. And I do it anyway. Why? I want the FULL freedom offered in each Step. I cheat myself out of that freedom if I don't say the humbling words "Will you Sponsor (help) me?"



First, I needed to be fully informed about the problem(s) that brought me to CPA to evaluate whether I qualified, and boy did I. Next, I needed to be informed of the solution that included a formal working of the Twelve Steps and then, living them. I was very fortunate; after going to multiple meetings daily for many months, listening, watching carefully and learning, the first person I asked to Sponsor me agreed.

He made it very clear that his job was to help guide me through the CPA Twelve Steps by meeting regularly. Separately and together we read CPA's Step guide *Recipe for Recovery* and I wrote on each Step as it appeared. I would then read the contents to him weekly. Health crises and emergencies were perfectly

viable reasons for canceling, but there was a stated commitment, a contract between us for both of us to show up, going as slowly as needed, but to do it. He was also clear that after we concluded, our weekly meetings would end so that I could take another CPA member through the Steps as he had with me.



I am a “newbie;” I went to my first meeting just 4 months ago. I was not familiar with a Twelve Step program so at first, it was pretty overwhelming. I had no idea how my Higher Power was going to help me along this journey of recovery. I just knew that I needed to change the way I was doing things.

When I nervously told my Sponsor I did not want to be a burden, she replied, “I can take care of myself; you take care of yourself. So don’t worry about me. If I cannot meet or take a call right away, I will let you know. In CPA you will learn to give yourself permission to take care of you.” I almost laughed out loud. It was such a relief. I did not need to worry about her – she was there to help me. She gave me a few ideas on how to get started, but also said, “Take what works for you and leave the rest.” And I could tell that she meant it.



When I first came to CPA, there was only one person that was available for Sponsorship that I knew about, and we didn’t really mix well. I could tell I would have a hard time taking suggestions from them. Someone mentioned the idea of finding a Fellow Traveler or Step Buddy, someone else who was serious about the program and working the steps but who also hasn’t worked them yet either.

I asked a friend if they wanted to go through the book *Recipe for Recovery* together, and they agreed. It was an interesting experience to not have one of us impart their wisdom on the other, but together we shared our current experience and wisdom as we went along. They were a neighbor and could walk down to my place and climb on my bed with me as we did our step work and explored applying the steps to our chronic illnesses and pain.



I have Sponsored many people in my other program, but I'm finding working with others in CPA to be very different. In my other program, if someone doesn't call at the set time, I take it as a reflection of their lack of willingness. In CPA, it might be a lack of willingness, but it might also be because someone is not feeling well. I try to remember that each Sponsee has different health challenges.

I try to take my Sponsees through the steps as quickly as possible because I want them to get the relief that I found in this program. I don't have the resources to meet with each Sponsee weekly and go through the book, so I encourage and trust them to find a step buddy or to attend book study meetings. However, I know other Sponsors do have the resources for a slow read through the book, so I might not be the right fit for everybody. I trust my Higher Power to guide me to the Sponsees who are the right fit for me.



Recently, I've taken on a service role in CPA that requires me to be familiar with the Traditions and Concepts. I'm finding that service is pushing me to grow even faster than I was, as my character defects come out in working with others. My Sponsor is now serving many roles. She is still the person I reach out to when I'm struggling with the emotional and spiritual debilitation of chronic pain and chronic illness, although I have a good group of CPA friends that I often reach out to first. Now my Sponsor is also the person walking me through the Traditions and Concepts so that I can be the best version of myself as I take on being a trusted servant of CPA. Additionally, I am now taking someone through the steps, and I reach out to my Sponsor whenever I have a question about how to work with my Sponsee.



I saw a Sponsorship need in the CPA fellowship, had a desire to help fill it, but with limited time and availability. I had worked Steps in a group in other fellowships, and am currently still in a Step group that meets daily, so I know we can achieve Stepwork in this setting. I thought this might work well in CPA. I started a small Step group with a few people I Sponsor and a few people who simply expressed a desire to work the Steps in CPA. We meet weekly for one hour and the members are going through the Steps together. It's a slow but steady, rewarding process.

I now have two such groups with five members each. So for two hours a week, ten people are currently going through the Steps. This is my way of helping as many people as possible get into their Stepwork, and to hopefully create more Sponsors for our fellowship. I don't have ten hours a week to give, but giving of myself this way feels like I'm giving back to CPA in the best way I know how. The support and love in these groups is beautiful. I love seeing people find recovery and learning from one another, and such Step groups are a privilege to lead.



Being guided through the CPA Steps by a seasoned Sponsor was life changing and completely different than in other Twelve Step Programs. It required that I set aside everything I thought I knew about recovery. The compassion and love imbued in the CPA Program and in my Sponsor fundamentally changed my relationship with myself, with others and with a newly imagined HP. This new HP that was safe enough for the most vulnerable parts of me, allowed me to joyfully surrender the burden of trying to care for myself via my own power.

I have since had the privilege of taking another woman through the CPA Twelve Steps. As best as I can, I am passing on the radical generosity and compassion that was so lovingly gifted to me. What an amazing Program. What an amazing life.