

Tool: Sponsorship

When we come to our first COSA meetings, most of us find a reprieve from our pain, loneliness, and trauma—a place where we are finally understood and supported. In the loving company of our fellow COSAs, we can finally breathe again, discovering to our great relief that we are not alone.

As time passes, we notice that many of our fellow COSAs with the greatest peace and healing have done more than just attend meetings—they work the Steps. Seeing these results, we long to move toward our own peace and healing by working the Steps ourselves. We do not do this alone; in COSA we seek the guidance of a sponsor.

A sponsor is a person in the program who serves as our guide as we work the Twelve Steps of COSA. This is someone with whom we can share our story more fully, and who shares their own experience, strength, and hope with us.

It can be daunting to ask another COSA member to be our sponsor. We may be unused to asking for things for ourselves or worried about imposing upon another person's time. However, asking someone to sponsor us is an important growth opportunity for us, in which we learn to advocate for ourselves and trust that anyone we ask to be our sponsor will demonstrate their own healthy boundaries. *Because of the close nature of the relationship, we avoid asking those with whom the potential for romantic or other inappropriate interest may exist.*

Some of us are drawn to the recovery of a person in our regular meetings and know immediately that we want to ask them to be our sponsor. Others take more time to find someone whose outlook on recovery inspires us. We may need to ask multiple people before we find someone who is available to be our sponsor. Those who do not find available sponsors in local meetings may find someone through phone or Zoom meetings, retreats, or COSA's annual convention. When sponsors are not available, we may enter into co-sponsorship with another COSA with whom we can work the Steps in tandem, or form a Step Group of several COSAs working the Steps together.

Some of us begin with a temporary sponsor. Others find that the roles of our sponsor relationships change at various points in our recovery. If we ever need to change or end a sponsor/sponsee relationship, we do our best to do so lovingly, forthrightly, and with the guidance of our Higher Power.

No matter what path leads to finding our sponsor, we find the benefits of this close relationship to be a great help in working the Steps. Our sponsors guide us in our Step work, sharing the resources and practices they found most helpful on their journeys. They are often the first people we turn to when recovery becomes difficult or our path unclear. Our sponsors listen with loving acceptance to our personal narratives and our Fifth Steps; they help us identify our unmanageable behaviors and character defects. They are the ones with whom we carefully plan

our **Ninth Step** amends. They are accountability partners for our emotional sobriety and a source of safe and loving support as we navigate our recovery. Our sponsors should not become our Higher Power; rather, they guide us toward the loving care of our true Higher Power.

Eventually, our sponsors encourage us to pass on the gift of recovery by becoming sponsors ourselves. Some of us may hesitate to take on what seems like a great responsibility, but we realize that the best way to show our gratitude for the loving gift of our sponsor's time and guidance is to pay it forward to someone else.

We are reassured that all we have to do is follow the example our own sponsors set for us: to listen with love and acceptance, to offer guidance when needed, and to share our own experience, strength, and hope in working the Steps. We are careful to guide our sponsees without giving directives or unsolicited advice, since it is not our responsibility, and we do not have the expertise or the right to make decisions for our sponsees. Instead, we remind them to always seek the guidance of their Higher Power.

We tell our sponsees that we are one source of support for them but not their sole support. It is to our benefit to "spread a wide net" —to have a whole network of COSAs we can contact for emotional and recovery support. Our meeting phone lists are a good source of contact information for COSAs that can be part of our support network.

As we pick up the mantle of sponsorship, the gifts of the program multiply, and our own recovery deepens. Guiding our sponsees through the Steps provides us greater insight into our own Step work. We may even hear ourselves saying to a sponsee the exact thing we need to hear at a certain moment.

Sponsorship challenges us to continue to grow: in assisting someone else to see themselves more clearly, we learn to look at ourselves in greater depth. As we support our sponsees in identifying their shortcomings, we can be brought face-to-face with our own most persistent defects of character. In encouraging our sponsees to turn their lives and their wills over to the care of their Higher Power, we may find we are more easily able to let go of our own troubles. There are also times when our sponsees share with us insights and lessons that are new to us.

We discover that we can be of the most benefit to our sponsees when we don't just tell them about the tools of recovery, but demonstrate through our own actions how to live them. In being of service this way, we strengthen our own recovery.

When we feel unsure of what to do or question whether we are up to the task, our own sponsors continue to give us guidance. We are reminded that the journeys of our sponsees are their own to walk —we can show the way but not walk it for them. Their achievements and their disappointments are their own—their challenges are not ours to fix, nor their growth ours to claim. We are afforded many opportunities to practice turning our sponsees over to the care of their Higher Power. Just as our sponsors did with us, we practice loving detachment that

gives our sponsees room to learn and grow on their own. We celebrate their successes with them and comfort them when they cry over their losses. And when the time comes, we teach them how they, too, can best keep what they have been given by giving it away.