

Finding the Right 12-Step Meeting for Young Adults

Early recovery can be a time of discomfort, so finding a 12-step meeting that you feel comfortable in is important. Though fellowships like Alcoholics Anonymous have been around for several decades, people at meetings tend to be older, male, and white, making it difficult for people from other backgrounds to feel at home. This tipsheet provides information to help you find the right 12-step meeting, if that is a path you wish to pursue.

Try several different meetings

The different types of programs (like AA or NA) have different types of meetings (like open, closed, women, LGBTQIA+, etc.) and usually many individual groups. This means you have lots of meetings to choose from if you don't find a good fit right away. Meetings are full of individuals who have their own points of view. Some people might be negative or not accepting. If you encounter something like this, please remember there are plenty more meetings! Also, 12-step fellowships are not the only option out there. If none of these feel right to you, try other options like SMART Recovery.

Remember to speak up

People in recovery want to hear from you. When you go to meetings, introduce yourself and let them know you are new. Your best resource will be others traveling the same journey. The chances are you will find people who have been through similar experiences and want to help. Keep in mind that all of them were new at one point, so they have gone through what you are experiencing. The basic format for all 12-step meetings starts with people sharing their experience. Keep in mind, though, that this type of sharing can bring up traumatic memories. If this vulnerability might be an issue for you, it may be wise to discuss the issue with a trusted advisor or counselor.

Match your needs

If your main concern is alcohol, then AA might be the right choice. If drugs are an issue, then Narcotics Anonymous or Cocaine Anonymous might be best. This is not to say you have to find a perfect match. Most people have a variety of issues, so may not fit exactly into one fellowship. Keep in mind alternatives like SMART Recovery as well, if none of these work for you.

Keep in mind group conventions

Many in 12-step meetings have long-held views about issues like whether people use medication and how people introduce themselves. So, if you are going to an AA meeting, you may find some resistance introducing yourself as an “addict” or talking about drugs. These views do not represent all people in 12-step recovery! Most people in meetings want to make it as welcoming and comfortable as possible. Look for these people and they can help you.

Consider your location

Places with a larger population have many more meetings of all different types – places with a smaller population tend to have mainly AA meetings and possibly a few NA meetings. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, many meetings have gone online using platforms like Zoom. These online meetings can be especially helpful if you can’t find the right fit in your location (like if you live in a place with only a few meetings).

Find a specific fellowship

Many areas have meetings for young people, men, women, LGBTQIA+, and others. Most meeting schedules will provide this information. Some programs also hold larger gatherings (sometimes called conferences) focused on specific groups in their fellowship. AA, for example, holds the International Conference of Young People in AA every year, as well as many regional and state conferences.

Additional resources

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

In-person meetings: aa.org/find-aa

Virtual meetings: aa-intergroup.org/meetings

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

In-Person meetings: na.org/meetingsearch/

Virtual meetings: virtual-na.org

It is helpful to download a 12-step app, such as Meeting Guide or NA Meeting Search.

If you have additional ideas or feedback, please send us a message through our website:

JEAPinitiative.org

