

\*\*\* HOW TO START AND GROW A SA GROUP \*\*\*

By Margery Wakefield

Welcome to SA (Schizophrenics Anonymous)!

I understand that you want to start a SA group, and that is great!

This is a brief primer on how to do just that.

First, some background about myself. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 19. I went through a period of denial, but finally came to my senses and got on meds. I have been on meds and in treatment since then. My recovery now is pretty good.

I first heard about SA in 2004. I went to a SA conference in the Detroit area, and learned how to run a SA group. There was another woman in Denver, and we joined forces to start SA Denver in September of 2005.

At first, it was just the two of us. We made up flyers and distributed them in mental health centers, in clinics and in hospitals. Then, we waited. And waited.

Finally, another man joined us. Then, another woman. Now, we have an average of 15 or so members at each meeting. SA Denver continues to grow and to thrive. Members come and go, so I think we have helped a lot of people in 10 years.

The members of the group have bonded with each other, and become like a family, although we are always open to new members. We now have a coffee group on Saturdays, a walking group when the weather is good. We socialize with each other. We go to concerts together, to local museums, to the zoo, and other places.

This is just an example of what can happen with your SA group. Be prepared for success!

Now, I will share with you the steps to starting and growing a successful SA group:

1. First, order yourself a SA Blue Book from SARDAA. The Blue Book is a small manual which contains much useful information about SA including the history of SA, the philosophy of SA and the Mission Statement. It also contains some interesting stories of persons in recovery from schizophrenia and related disorders at the end of the book. The Blue Book costs \$5 per copy, and is well worth the price. We do use the Blue Book in our meetings, so it is important to read it.

2. The second step is to order the Group Leader Manual by email. You can print this off. It is a reference book, about 70 pages long, which tells everything important about starting and running a SA group. The Group Leader Manual is free of charge by email.
3. Now you are ready to look for a meeting place for your group, if you don't already have one. Mental health centers in your community will often offer free meeting space for your group. Other possible venues are hospitals, churches, libraries, and community centers. Often, centers or churches that already host AA or NA meetings will welcome your group.
4. Once you have your meeting space, you can decide on the time and day of the week for your group. There are no rules about this. The time and day of the week for the group is at the discretion of the leader/co-leader. Some groups meet during the day, while others meet at night.
5. Next, you might want to print up some flyers advertising your group. There is a sample flyer in the Group Leader's Manual, and there are others available. Once you have printed up flyers, you can distribute them in local mental health centers, clinics and psychiatric hospitals.
6. It might be helpful for you at this point to talk to an established group leader to see how the group is run. There are leader sheets available in the Group Leader's Manual.  
In the groups, we have an introduction, a reading from a meditation book, then readings from the Blue Book. Then we usually read the Six Steps of Recovery, and have everyone pick out a step that they can relate to at this time, and give them time to discuss that step and how it relates to them now.  
Then, we have the general check-in. We have everyone share about his or her week or any other subject they wish to share about. We don't share about topics of religion, sex or politics unless it is very general. This is because these are topics that can be divisive to people, and we want the group to be safe for everyone.  
An important thing to remember is that we do not do therapy in the groups. SA is a social/educational peer support group. We leave therapy to the professionals. If someone is needing therapy, we refer them to their clinician.  
If there is time remaining in the hour, we read from the Blue Book, especially the personal stories from the back of the book.  
When the hour is up, we close the meeting with the Serenity Prayer, which is in the Blue Book.

That's about all there is to starting and running a SA group.

There are a few tips to growing your group:

1. In Denver, we found it helpful to make a list of all the local psychiatrists, their names and addresses, and to send them a letter once a year with two flyers enclosed. Psychiatrists are our main source of referrals. When a psychiatrist sees that one of

- his clients does well in our group, he or she is likely to send more members to the group.
2. We also visit the psychiatric hospitals in the city. We usually make an appointment with the Discharge Planners for the unit, and take him or her a small stack of flyers. We tell them about the group and tell them how the group can benefit their clients.
  3. We always continue to distribute flyers to mental health centers, clinics and hospitals.
  4. We sometimes advertise in free local newspapers that have listings for support groups such as AA and NA in the city.
  5. Word of mouth is also effective.
  6. If you follow these simple practices, your group will grow.
  7. Be prepared for success!

If you have any questions, please contact SARDAA at [info@sardaa.org](mailto:info@sardaa.org)

We will answer any questions that you might have.

I hope this is all helpful!

Sincerely,

Margery Wakefield

SA Coordinator