

About A.A.

A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

WINTER
2025

Common Myths and Misconceptions about Alcoholics Anonymous

ALSO INSIDE:

ALCOHOLICS
ANONYMOUS ANNOUNCES
THE RELEASE OF THE
PLAIN LANGUAGE
BIG BOOK — PLBB —
PRESS RELEASE

DOES A.A. WORK?

Some outside A.A. have expressed concern that the A.A. program does not work for everyone. Within A.A. this is widely understood as the natural outcome of individual desires and choices. The truth is that not everyone who seems to have a drinking problem wishes to stop. Not every problem drinker wishes to make the small but meaningful changes that make sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous possible. For those who do want to stop drinking, Alcoholics Anonymous has been pro-

viding a safe haven, a supportive community, and a path to sobriety that has been working for nearly 90 years.

SUCCESS — HISTORY

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) was formed in 1935 in Akron, Ohio, as the outcome of a meeting between Bill W., a New York stockbroker, and Dr. Bob S., an Akron surgeon. Both had been hopeless alcoholics. From the beginning, those seeking recovery would often find A.A. through referrals from their medical

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professionals, a trend that continues today. According to our most recent *membership survey* (<https://www.aa.org/membership-survey-2022>), 53% of those surveyed responded that a professional referred them to A.A.

Medical professionals also played an essential role in the founding of A.A. The first was Dr. William D. Silkworth of Towns Hospital in New York, who, as the doctor to co-founder Bill W., helped describe the nature of alcoholism, as a disease, similar to an allergy.

Dr. Silkworth wrote an introduction to the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, (commonly called the “Big Book” (<https://www.aa.org/the-big-book>)). Fearful of professional repercussions, the anonymous letter from Dr. Silkworth described his own experience: that A.A. was successful for those who participated in the program. Later, in subsequent editions of the Big Book, as the A.A. program became more widely accepted, Dr. Silkworth’s name was published with his letter.

Another professional who made a profound impact on the early development of Alcoholics Anonymous was the remarkable [Sister Ignatia](#), who cared for and brought A.A. to some 5,000 sufferers in the Akron- Cleveland area. She worked alongside co-founder Dr. Bob who devoted himself to hospital care for alcoholics,

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introducing them to A.A. principles. Large numbers of alcoholics flocked to Akron to receive care at St. Thomas Hospital.

SUCCESS — TODAY

Alcoholics Anonymous is guided by a set of principles called the “Twelve Traditions” of A.A. These traditions are suggested principles to ensure the survival and growth of the thousands of groups that make up the Fellowship. They are based on the experience of the groups themselves during the critical early years of the movement. These Traditions caution us against conducting or endorsing any scientific or medical research. A.A. has no opinion on research. But we can share what our friends who conduct research have found.

In 2020, Stanford University published a study, “Alcoholics Anonymous and Other 12-step Programs for Alcohol Use Disorder.” The results of this study showed that “Alcoholics Anonymous... is the most

effective path to abstinence, according to a comprehensive analysis conducted by [a Stanford University] researcher and his collaborators” (<https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2020/03/alcoholics-anonymous-most-effective-path-to-alcohol-abstinence>).

Another noteworthy study is New York University’s “Brain Images Reveal First Physical Evidence that Prayers Reduce Cravings in Alcoholics Anonymous Members,” published in 2016 (<https://nyulangone.org/news/brain-images-reveal-first-physical-evidence-prayers-reduce-cravings-alcoholics-anonymous-members>). One important finding in this study was that craving “is diminished in long-term AA members compared to patients who have stopped drinking for some period of time but are more vulnerable to relapse.”

SPIRITUAL BUT NEVER RELIGIOUS

Many who are unfamiliar with Alcoholics Anonymous have a common misconception that it is a religious program. Again, the Twelve Traditions declare that A.A. has no affiliation with any sect, denomination, or religion. Many who seek recovery come to A.A. with no spiritual practice and find one in A.A.’s Twelve Step program of recovery. Others come with the faith of their family or culture and find they develop a renewed

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understanding and new appreciation for a spiritual lifestyle they may have disconnected from. Still others are atheist, agnostic, open to any faith, or no faith at all. Simply put, there are *no* religious requirements for membership, and A.A. as a whole is affiliated with no one religious tradition. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Stories on how those who seek recovery come to A.A. and find their own definition of spirituality are found in the A.A. pamphlets “[Many Paths to Spirituality](https://www.aa.org/many-paths-spirituality)” (<https://www.aa.org/many-paths-spirituality>) and “[The ‘God’ Word: Agnostic and Atheist Members in A.A.](https://www.aa.org/god-word-agnostic-and-atheist-members-aa)” (<https://www.aa.org/god-word-agnostic-and-atheist-members-aa>).

A.A. AS PROFESSIONALS

Another question that we get in the AAWS office is “Are your members certified?” and sometimes “Do you have A.A. counselors?” The A.A. Traditions also guide us in keeping A.A. groups non-professional. Our members are volunteers. A.A. meetings are free to attend. At A.A. meetings,

members share how they stay sober to help each other and to ensure their own continued recovery — we do this not as counselors or professionals, but as a fellowship of peers.

For those A.A. members who are employed as professionals in recovery-related fields, Alcoholics Anonymous publishes guidelines to help those members separate their membership and professional roles. This helps avoid confusion for both the professional member and the non-professional. It also helps Alcoholics Anonymous remain separate from or unaffiliated with outside practices. Those guidelines are found on our website at *A.A. Guidelines for A.A. Members Employed in the Alcoholism Field* (<https://www.aa.org/aa-guidelines-aa-members-employed-alcoholism-field>).

“With all the Twelfth Step work that goes on throughout the Fellowship — carrying the message into hospitals, prisons, and schools; working with counselors, judges and administrators — it’s easy to see how one might

think there could be A.A. professionals,” a recent Cooperation with the Professional Community coordinator observed, “Yet, as much as A.A. members cooperate throughout the alcoholism and treatment fields, they are never paid to carry the message of hope and recovery to another alcoholic. As A.A. members, we cooperate with professionals to help alcoholics and serve as a resource to provide information about A.A.”

HOW CAN A.A. HELP YOU?

For more information on Alcoholics Anonymous, please reach out to the Cooperation with the Professional Community Desk (CPC) desk, at cpc@aa.org. Our office can connect you with local A.A. volunteers who can provide A.A. materials, inform your clients and staff on how to find A.A. in your community and arrange to give a presentation to staff or clients in your facility. Helping professionals help alcoholics who seek recovery from alcoholism is our purpose. We welcome your questions, comments and requests.

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“The only way to educate is to break through some of these myths.”

HIGHLIGHT

Alcoholics Anonymous Announces the Release of the Plain Language Big Book — PLBB — press release

(NEW YORK, NY) — November 7, 2024 —

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) has announced the publication of the *Plain Language Big Book: A Tool for Reading Alcoholics Anonymous*, a new resource designed to make the Twelve Step recovery program more accessible to individuals who may encounter difficulties comprehending the language of the original text *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which was first published in 1939.

Commonly known as the “Big Book,” the original edition serves as the cornerstone of A.A.’s Twelve Step recovery program from alcoholism. The *Plain Language Big Book* retains the foundational ideas and spiritual messages of the original but presents them in simpler, more contemporary language. This new edition is designed to assist those who may have reading challenges or lack regular engagement with other A.A. members who can explain the program.

The creation of the *Plain Language Big Book* responds to a need expressed by many in the A.A. community to make the lifesaving message of A.A. more accessible. Developed collaboratively by A.A. members and publishing professionals, this edition serves as a vital tool for individuals seeking understanding of the core tenets of the A.A. program. The *Plain Language Big Book* has been published with the support of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, as expressed in a vote of A.A.’s 2024 General Service Conference.

A.A. encourages individuals to purchase the book from local groups, intergroups, and central offices to support Twelfth Step work. For more information and to place an order, visit the [AAWS web store](#).

Publication date: November 1, 2024

ISBN: 978-1-64427-877-2

Suggested List Price: USD 11.00

Format: Softcover with flaps; 8-1/2” x 11”

Also available as an e-book, wherever e-books are available.

