

SLIPS

“For some reason or other, the Lord has laid out tougher paths for some of us.” So says Alcoholics Anonymous Co-Founder Bill W. on page 11 of *As Bill Sees It*, speaking about slips. A slip—a return to an addictive substance after a period of abstinence—is not uncommon in the rooms of recovery, especially when dealing with food, one of the more insidious addictions.

Fortunately, the Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW program is designed to treat food addiction; it gives us the structure we need to stay on the path of recovery. As sponsors in the CEA-HOW program, we play instrumental roles in helping our sponsees avoid, prevent and recover from slips.

Defining a Slip

The first thing CEA-HOW sponsors need to know is how CEA-HOW defines a slip. Fortunately the *Sponsor Guidelines* outlines it clearly on page 3: “...a slip is anything that is not on the food plan, anything more than the food plan allows, eating between meals or skipping a meal.”

As abstaining compulsive eaters, we may have individual definitions of a slip. For example, on a personal level, we may abstain from gum, artificial sweeteners and behaviors such as eating in the car. While it’s important to define for ourselves what works in our abstinence, it’s equally important we stick to the CEA-HOW definition of a slip with our sponsees and not impart our own personal variations.

If a sponsee slips according to the CEA-HOW definition, we can again turn to the *Sponsor Guidelines*. Page 3 provides instructions on what to do. As sponsors, it’s important that we are familiar with these guidelines so we can give accurate direction.

Practicing Humility

When a sponsee slips, it may be difficult for sponsors not to take it personally. We may get upset or angry. Perhaps we think it was something we did or did not say that caused them to slip. Or maybe we think if only we had said or done something differently, the person would have stayed abstinent. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This is where we need to regain perspective—we are simply not that powerful. But while we can’t give abstinence to anybody, we can share our own experience with the Step One (which will remind ourselves at the same time.)

At this point, it also may be helpful to take our own inventory. Have we been setting a good example by working the CEA-HOW Steps and Tools? Were we available for our sponsee’s daily phone calls? If we owe amends, we can make them promptly for our own recovery and serenity.

It's very important for us to ask for help. Working with sponsees who have returned to eating can be stressful. The sponsee may be emotional, rebellious, depressed—or all three. While making sure to keep with the principle of anonymity, we need to seek counsel from our own sponsors and other recovering CEA-HOW members who have experience in this area. Remember, we are not alone.

Setting Boundaries

CEA-HOW does not offer guidelines on how long to sponsor a person who continues to slip. You may decide to continue working with a chronic slipper if the relationship is beneficial and productive. You may decide the sponsee would better be served by working with someone with a different perspective from you. Or you may decide that this sponsee is threatening your own abstinence and you need to let that person go. Whatever decision you make is between you, your Higher Power and your own sponsor.

If a sponsee is showing signs of not being ready or willing to stop eating, you may want to keep in mind what it says in the Big Book (BB) of Alcoholics Anonymous on page 96: "We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you." Continuing to sponsor somebody who is clearly not ready also prevents us from sponsoring somebody who is. "One of our Fellowship failed entirely with his first half dozen prospects. He often says that if he had continued to work on them, he might have deprived many others, who have since recovered, of their chance" (BB, 96).

Whether your sponsees are slipping or not, the most important thing to remember is that the person benefitting the most is you. You're getting the chance to be of service, which is the most effective way of preventing your own slips.

Renewing Effort

One of the most important ways we can be of service to sponsees who slip is to help them learn from it. Slips contain valuable lessons that can deepen our commitment to recovery. Discourage your sponsees from engaging in excess guilt and remorse, and encourage them to use their energy to renew their efforts at recovery.

In addition to answering the *Further Thoughts on Abstinence* questions, you can also have them write an inventory on the slip, what led up to it, what they were feeling at the time, who was involved, etc. After they read it to you, you can help them determine the lessons the slip contained and what they can do differently next time. Remind them there is no shame in slipping..."you can be penalized only for refusing to try for better things" (ABSI, 68).

Abstaining Emotionally

A common saying in Twelve-Step rooms says that picking up the substance is the *last* step in a relapse process. We may have sponsees who are not eating compulsively but who are exhibiting behavior inconsistent with the principles of recovery. Perhaps they've stopped going to meetings, aren't being of

service, or are practicing dishonesty and selfishness. They may be thin but are still “restless, irritable and discontent” (BB, page xxvi).

You can help your sponsees guard against a slip by reminding them that abstinence is much bigger than just following a food plan—it’s an entire way of being, thinking and acting. If we are just following the food plan, we aren’t in recovery—we’re simply on a diet.

You can hold them accountable to working all Seven Tools on a daily basis and perhaps review Steps One, Two, and Three. This will give them the opportunity to stop the slippery behavior before it turns into an actual slip.

Being Gentle

As CEA-HOW sponsors, we set the tone for how sponsees handle slips. While keeping appropriate boundaries, we can be gentle and kind and offer constructive feedback and guidance. Slips don’t have to be a part of the recovery experience. But if they are, we can certainly help our sponsees learn from them and help them get back on the path of recovery.