

BACK TO BASICS

How to give sponsees the information they need to succeed in the CEA-HOW program.

Any abstaining member of Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW who has not experienced the joy and satisfaction of helping another compulsive eater recover has not yet fully realized the benefits of this program. Becoming a CEA-HOW sponsor is perhaps the most important way we can not only help someone else recover from compulsive eating but also ensure our own recovery since we must “give it away in order to keep it.”

This month we’re going to give you a general overview of how a CEA-HOW sponsor-sponsee relationship forms and the information that you as a sponsor need to impart to your sponsees. Use this information as a “checklist” to make sure you’re giving your sponsees a thorough and accurate understanding of what working the CEA-HOW program entails.

It’s important that you sponsor others, and it’s equally important that you have a sponsor. As it says on page one of the *Sponsor Guidelines*, “Share your commitment to sponsorship. Be sure that the newcomer understands that just as the newcomer needs a sponsor, so do you. As a sponsor, you need to be continuously working your own CEA-HOW sponsor.”

There is a lot of information to impart to sponsees and you don’t have to do it all at once. Rather, as you let your sponsees know what *they* need to do to recover from compulsive eating, you get to share what *you’ve* done to recover. Since “the more we give the more we receive,” both you and your sponsee will benefit from this ongoing dialogue as you both work the CEA-HOW program together, one day at a time.

1. Introductions

Introductions typically happen at beginning or end of CEA-HOW meetings and go something like this:

Sponsor: “Hi, do you need a sponsor?”

Newcomer: “Yes, I do.”

Sponsor: “How did you find out about CEA-HOW? Do you know anything about our program?”

Depending on what the newcomer says, you may need to explain the fundamentals of the program. You may need to explain that CEA-HOW is a 12-step program that requires members to follow a food plan, weigh and measure food, make four phone calls a day, and complete daily reading and writing assignments.

You'll need to make sure that the newcomer understands that CEA-HOW is not a diet club; rather, it is a program of recovery that addresses food addiction that welcomes anyone who wants to stop eating compulsively—whether obese, anorexic and anything in between. The name Compulsive Eaters Anonymous-HOW was specifically chosen to be inclusive; our literature does not use the term “overeater” for that reason.

Once you've provided an overview of the program, you can ask the newcomer more specific questions similar to what Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) cofounders Bill W. and Dr. Bob asked a newcomer on page 186 in *The Big Book*:

- “Do you want to stop eating compulsively?”
- “Do you think you can stop on your own?”
- “Do you believe in some sort of Higher Power?”
- “Would you be willing to ask that Higher Power help you with your eating problem?”

The purpose of these questions is—as Bill and Dr. Bob put it—to find out if the newcomer is ready, willing, and able to follow the CEA-HOW program. This will help to not waste the newcomer's time and free you up to work with somebody who is willing to stop eating compulsively.

Another question you can ask is this: “Why do you want me to sponsor you?” This gives you the opportunity to share with the newcomer what you do to stay abstinent and lets them know that they will need to do what you do if you are going to sponsor them (“If you want what I have then you need to do what I do”). Asking this question also gives you the opportunity to see what the newcomer is willing to do for his or her recovery.

If the newcomer is ready to stop eating compulsively and wants to work with you—congratulations! You now have a new sponsee.

2. The Food Plan

Let your sponsee know that since CEA-HOW members weigh and measure their food, he or she will need to get a food scale, measuring cups, and spoons.

Escort your new sponsee to the literature table. Your sponsee needs to purchase the *Forever Abstinent* gray booklet, which outlines the CEA-HOW food plan and guidelines. Since newcomers must have a sponsor to purchase the booklet, you will need to let the literature person know you are the newcomer's sponsor. Instruct your sponsee to read the booklet from cover to cover and jot down questions to ask you later.

Point out a few important highlights in the food plan, such as there are no grains other than oat bran in the first 30 days and no sugar or flour in any of its forms unless they're listed fifth or lower in the ingredients list on food labels.

3. CEA-HOW Literature

Along with *Forever Abstinent*, your sponsee needs to purchase two books from Alcoholics Anonymous: *The Big Book* and *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. Explain that he or she will need these books to complete the daily writing assignments (that you will neither judge nor “red pencil.”)

Make sure to give your sponsee a newsletter/meeting directory, a newcomer packet—if your meeting provides them—and a phone list. Ask him or her to get a new notebook and pen.

4. Three Weekly CEA-HOW Meetings

Explain that attendance at three CEA-HOW meetings a week is required. The meetings can be face-to-face, phone bridge, or a combination of the two. Refer him or her to this website (www.ceahow.org) for face-to-face and phone bridge meeting information.

Explain that even though yes, we’re all busy, attending three weekly meetings is non-negotiable, and your sponsee will need to alter his or her schedule to accommodate this requirement. (You may need to remind him or her that just as we went to any lengths to eat compulsively, we must also be willing to go to any lengths to recover from food addiction.)

If a sponsee has accessibility to face-to-face meetings but chooses to attend phone bridge meetings, you may want to explore the issue of isolationism, which is frequently a large part of our disease.

5. Outreach Calls and the Phone List

Explain to your sponsee that the program requires members to make three phone calls a day to other CEA-HOW members. Talking to other CEA-HOW members can be like a mini-meeting and also help end isolation. On your sponsee’s phone list, check off the names of people you know who have a good program to share and welcome outreach calls.

6. Establishing a Call Time

Set up a time for your new sponsee to call you every day. Explain that you’re holding this time slot for him or her. Let him or her know that the phone call will generally last for about 15 minutes. Let sponsees know if they don’t call for three consecutive days without previous arrangements, you may give this time slot to someone else.

Explain that daily phone calls are structured and that your sponsee is expected to do this:

- Commit a written-down menu based on the CEA-HOW first-30-days food plan.
- Read the previous day’s writing assignment.
- Receive a new reading/writing assignment from you.

(Note: During the call, you may also want to ask how your sponsee is doing with outreach calls and meeting attendance.)

7. Slips

Explain to your sponsee what a slip is. According to page three in the *Sponsor Guidelines* book, 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.”

It is important that you stick to this definition of a slip and not add your own interpretations such as “eating in the car” or “not making three phone calls.” Explain that the program is structured this way as we are treating a food addiction and must be rigorously honest with everything that goes in our mouths.

8. CEA-HOW Meeting Etiquette

You’ll need to go over CEA-HOW meeting etiquette. Teach your sponsee what “crosstalk” and outside issues are, to be considerate by being quiet and paying attention when members are sharing, and to always thank the speaker if the meeting has one.

9. Service.

Explain to your sponsee that service is the foundation of our program and that he or she will need to get a service commitment at a meeting(s). Explain that service commitments help us to get to meetings (especially when we’re tired or don’t feel like it), get out of ourselves, and give back to the fellowship.

Although some service positions, such as secretary or treasurer, have abstinence requirements, others do not. Let your sponsee know that he or she can be of service immediately by getting to meetings early to help set up, staying late to clean up, or volunteering to be a greeter or timer.

In Closing...

There’s a lot to learn about sponsoring in the CEA-HOW program. This is one of the reasons we call our own sponsors every day — we need to learn from somebody who is farther along the path than we are.

Sponsoring is a skill like any other that gets easier with time. Like anything else, we catch on bit by bit, step by step, and one day at a time. So remember our slogan that works for both newcomers and sponsors alike: Easy Does It.

Articles are written by CEA-HOW members and the opinions expressed in them do not necessarily reflect CEA-HOW as a whole.