

Evaluating the Quality of Sponsorship and Other Peer Guidance Relationships

Given the importance of peer support in starting and maintaining recovery, what factors can be used to select a sponsor or mentor? In most recovery mutual aid groups, longer-term members who are in successful recovery help orient new members to the particular recovery program. AA and NA have formalized this process through the practice of sponsorship. Having and frequently calling upon a sponsor is an important indicator of improved long-term recovery outcomes. Sponsoring others is a particularly potent factor in long-term recovery. Recovery support groups that do not have formal sponsors typically provide informal mentoring and guidance.

Periodically assessing how the relationship is going is also important. Consider the following eight factors. Discussing this with your sponsor and/or other peer supporter is often helpful.

1. **Trust:** Do I feel physically and emotionally safe around this person? When talking with others, does s/he emphasize my strengths and progress instead of my weaknesses and setbacks?
2. **Respect:** Does this person treat me in ways that feel respectful? Is what I tell her/him kept appropriately between us?
3. **Personal Character:** Does this person live her/his life in a way that I would like to achieve? Do her/his core values match those I have or would like to develop? Is this individual respected by others in long-term recovery?
4. **Sobriety Quantity:** Has this person been successful enough in his or her own recovery and for a long enough period that I can trust her or his guidance?
5. **Recovery Program Knowledge:** Is this person knowledgeable about this particular recovery support program? Is s/he a good sponsor/mentor/teacher?
6. **Time Availability:** Does this person have time available to spend with me on a regular basis?
7. **Quality of Time:** Is this individual able to set aside her/his own needs when we are interacting to focus on my needs? Does this person avoid wasting my time?
8. **Accessibility:** Can I reach this person during times of critical need, including evenings and on weekends?

Adapted by George S. Braucht, LPC and distributed with Bill White's permission. The original is available at www.williamwhitepapers.com/recovery_toolkit.

