

Eight Step Recovery - Using the Buddha's Teachings to Overcome Addiction Mason-John and Groves

Eight Step Recovery Meetings

It has been one year since the first edition was launched, and we have had many requests for how to run an Eight Step Recovery Meeting. These Eight Step Meetings have been pioneered in India, United Kingdom and Canada.

Below we suggest a meeting format that has been tried and tested. Many people have benefited from these meetings and we hope you will too. We have suggested several types of meeting, while always including the Welcome, Meeting Guidelines, the Preamble, and reciting the five training principles in negative and positive form in call and response and the eight steps in unison. We would suggest you have the above printed out on cards - so that different people can read them out aloud.

Decide which meeting format will work for you. We also include suggestions of how to mentor people through the eight step model.

MEETING FORMAT

Welcome

Welcome my name is and I will lead the 3 minute breathing space (AGE) this evening:

Become Aware of your body... Aware of sensation in the body... Aware of thoughts...
Aware of emotions...

Gather your breath on the upper lip - in the abdomen - and let the contact of the breath calm your thoughts...

Expand the breath throughout the whole body. Let me hear everyone take a deep breath and expand it throughout the body.

I would like to remind all of us of our suggested **meeting guidelines**:

If there is more than one person there are enough people for a meeting.

The only requirement to attend this meeting is the desire to live your life by the five precepts, or training principles to train the mind.

Please respect people's personal sharing - let what you hear stay here.

Be kind to yourself, and in turn be kind to others.

Enjoy your recovery.

We invite you to introduce yourself - and why you are here this evening. Please take one minute maximum - thank you. It is also okay for you not to say anything too.

After introductions, ask if there are any newcomers, and please welcome them.

Will somebody please read the preamble?

Preamble

This Eight Steps meeting explores recovery through the lens of the Buddhist teachings, and Buddhism through the lens of recovery. (If you are attending a 12 step meeting, this can be your expression of your 11th step and if you are not in a 12 step program, it can be another way to approach your recovery.) This is an extra meeting to compliment your recovery whatever that looks like.

For the next 1 and half hours or 2 hours we are temporarily going for refuge to the three jewels. What we mean by that, is as best we can we are placing the Buddha (not the person, but what he attained), the dharma (the teachings of the Buddha) and the sangha (the spiritual community, which is us) at the centre of our thoughts. Those of us in recovery know too well that our addiction has often been at the centre of our thoughts. So we begin with our moral inventory. (If a 12 step person is leading, you can say, just as in step three we turn our life and our will over to a god of our understanding, we are turning our life over temporarily to these three jewels.)

If you are Buddhist practitioner then please do the Pali first and let people know if it feels strange they can just listen. If you are not a Buddhist practitioner then please just recite the English as noted below.

Always do the negatives and positives as couplets in English, as it is valuable to reflect on what we are moving away from as well as what we are moving towards.

1. I undertake to abstain from harming life - with deeds of loving kindness I purify my body.
2. I undertake to abstain from taking the not given - with deeds of loving kindness I purify my body.
3. I undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct - with open handed generosity I purify my body.
4. I undertake to abstain from false speech - with truthful communication I purify my speech.
5. I undertake to abstain from taking intoxicants - with mindfulness clear and radiant I purify my mind.

We will now say the Eight Steps together

Step One: Accepting that this human life will bring suffering.

Step Two: Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives.

Step Three: Recognizing impermanence shows us that our suffering can end.

Step Four: Being willing to step onto the path of recovery, and discover freedom.

Step Five: Transforming our speech, actions, and livelihood.

Step Six: Placing positive values at the center of our lives.

Step Seven: Making every effort to stay on the path of recovery.

Step Eight: Helping others to share the benefits I have gained.

Here are several formats that can take place after the precepts and steps have been recited.

Format 1 (if you only have an hour - or you have a lot of people - we suggest you work through the steps weekly in the following way).

This evening we will focus on Step One: Accepting that this human life will bring suffering.

What does it mean for you to accept that this human life will bring about suffering, in the context of your dis-ease?

This evening we will focus on Step Two: Seeing how we create extra suffering in our lives.

How do I create extra suffering in my life?

This evening we will focus on Step Three: Recognizing impermanence shows us that our suffering can end.

What do I need to let go of in my life today?

This evening we will focus on Step Four: Being willing to step onto the path of recovery, and discover freedom.

How willing am I to step onto the path of recovery today? or What is one aspect of freedom I have discovered since being on the path of recovery?

This evening we will focus on Step Five: Transforming our speech, actions, and livelihood.

How can I begin transforming or continue to transform my speech, or actions, or livelihood? Just choose one to focus on.

This evening we will focus on Step Six: Placing positive values at the center of our lives.

What are some of the things that tend to occupy my thoughts ? What is the impact of having these thoughts at the center of my life?

This evening we will focus on Step Seven: Making every effort to stay on the path of recovery.

How can I make more effort to stay on the path of recovery?

This evening we will focus on Step Eight: Helping others to share the benefits I have gained.

What could I do this week to help share the benefits I have gained?

Format 2 - for longer meetings of 90 minutes to two hours.

For the next few weeks we will be exploring Step One. We will discuss every exercise, one exercise a week, and when a meditation or reflection comes up, we do the practice and discuss it after. We will work through each step in this way, until we get to the end of the book, and then begin again.

Format 3 - can be done in the shorter meeting and the longer meeting.

Book Study meeting:

Participants begin from the beginning of the book. They read a section for 15 to 20 minutes, and then discuss the text. When a reflection or meditation comes up, either listen to it from the book website or somebody lead it - and then discuss. Mark the page you finish on at each meeting, so you can begin from the correct page at the next meeting.

There are several ways of doing this. You can work through the book chronologically, beginning with the foreword, or you can ask someone to select a text that they would like to focus on. If the group is closed then it is appropriate to ask people to do reading at home and come prepared. However, there will be meetings that are open and people will drop in or not turn up every week, which is perfectly fine. Both kinds of groups can work. If it's the latter we advise each week someone will need to read a piece of the book out, or as a group you can pass the book around and read from it for ten to fifteen minutes and then discuss the topic.

You can be creative with the formats - although every meeting needs to begin with the AGE, the welcome, the introductions, the preamble, and reciting the training principles and the Eight Steps. Some meetings you may like to introduce a speaker, by asking someone to tell their story of recovery, abstinence, sobriety and their connection to the Buddhist teachings.

ENDING THE MEETINGS

We ask the meetings are ended in the following way:

Transference of merit said in unison. We offer a couple of versions, and of course you may know other Buddhist versions of this text.

Version 1

May the merit gained
in my acting thus
go to the alleviation of the suffering
of all beings.

My personality
throughout my existences,
my possessions,
and my merit in all three ways
I give up without regard
to myself
for the benefit of all beings.

Just as the earth
and other elements
are servicable in many ways
to the infinite number of beings
inhabiting limitless space,
so may I become
that which maintains all beings
situated throughout space
so long as all have not attained
to peace.

Version 2

*We come together in fellowship,
learning to recognize and let go of our unskilled words,
thoughts and deeds,
quieting our minds through meditation
and supporting each other on our path
to freedom from suffering.*

*May the merit gained in my acting thus,
go to the alleviation
of the suffering of all beings.*

Three minute breathing space, AGE (ask someone to lead this).

Ask for Dana (voluntary financial contribution) - nobody is paid. Dana is an act of generosity, showing an appreciation of the Buddhist Teachings. However there is no suggested fee, and nobody is turned away. There is no price to attend a meeting.

And nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable if they don't put into the pot. Just as recovery is a process, so is the act of generosity. Dana will pay for your meeting space, for materials, books, non-alcoholic drinks, and anything else you need. If you have a surplus, you might wish to give money to a participant who wants to attend a recovery retreat. We will also be introducing a donate button for Eight Step Recovery work in India, which will help some of the poorest communities in the world to deal with addiction in their communities.

Notes on how to run meetings:

- We ask that all meetings conduct abstinence of having food, at meetings. Of course we welcome non-alcoholic beverages.
- Meetings are peer led. Each group will decide on perhaps someone taking on responsibility for doing the welcome and asking people to read the preamble and lead the AGE, for a month or two. Make sure responsibility is shared.
- You may want to close your meeting - this is the group's decision. You may want to set up Eight Step Meetings for specific addictions, or more generally for substance abuse. This again is the decision of the people who set up the group.

Mentorship

- The book lends itself for people to be mentored through the Eight Step Recovery. We suggest if you want to mentor someone through the book, that you have read the book and have worked through every exercise and reflection on your own or in a book study. If you take on a mentee, then it would be expected you take the mentee through every exercise and reflection, and discuss the answers. We suggest that all mentees, do the 21 meditations for recovery, which are free and available on our website. We recommend requesting that they do one every day for three weeks.
- We also suggest that mentees are attending meetings. Meetings can include Eight Step Recovery, 12 step meetings or SMART recovery meetings. Additional meetings can include attending a Buddhist centre weekly, but not as an alternative while working the steps.
- Here are some - questions for mentees to answer before beginning the step work:
 - Are you prepared to go to any lengths to get your recovery? If someone asks what you mean by this, then you can say are they prepared to do every exercise and reflection in the book. Are they prepared to give what you may suggest a go?
 - What does addiction look like in your life today?
 - What does Recovery mean to you?
 - Share your personal story of addiction. In terms of your conditioning, what you have struggled with? What are the events that have marked your addiction?

Remember there are also meditations attached to the book, so for some meetings you could choose to **listen to a meditation** and then discuss how the meditation was for you. There is a website listed at the back of the book where you can download all the meditations in the book for free.