

Serenity Prayer

God,

Grant us the serenity
to accept the things
we cannot change,

Courage to change
the things we can,

And wisdom
to know the difference.

**RCA, 15 Sea Bridge Way
Alameda, CA 94502
1-877-663-2317
(toll free U.S. & Canada)
info@recovering-couples.org
www.recovering-couples.org**

Copyright © 2001, 2013 by the World Service
Organization for Recovering Couples Anonymous, Inc.,
Alameda, CA.

All Rights Reserved. This publication may not be
reproduced in any form whatsoever without the express
written permission of the World Service Organization for
Recovering Couples Anonymous, Inc.

“Recovering Couples Anonymous,” “RCA,” and the RCA
logo are registered trademarks of the World Service
Organization for Recovering Couples Anonymous, Inc.

Revised July 2013. Revised with minor edits and updates
January 2016 and January 2019.

RCA-WSO Board of Trustees Approved Literature

RECOVERING COUPLES ANONYMOUS®

Newcomer Couple:

*Welcome to Recovering
Couples Anonymous!*



RCA®

The intent of this brochure is to share information about the 12-Step fellowship Recovering Couples Anonymous (RCA). Its purpose is to guide a newcomer couple in RCA, and to answer questions that have been frequently asked by many of us.

We hope you will find the help and friendship that we as recovering couples have been privileged to enjoy in this fellowship.

Recovery Phone Numbers		
Name	Phone Number	E-mail

- 12. **Dysfunctional:** We have forgotten how to play together.
Functional: We are discovering lightheartedness and the joy of playfulness.
- 13. **Dysfunctional:** It is safer to get upset about little issues than to express our true feelings about larger ones.
Functional: We are learning to appropriately express our true feelings about issues both large and small.
- 14. **Dysfunctional:** It is easier to blame our partners than it is to accept our individual responsibilities.
Functional: We are learning to accept our individual responsibilities rather than focusing on our partners.
- 15. **Dysfunctional:** We deal with conflict by getting totally out of control or by not arguing at all.
Functional: We are learning to deal with conflict appropriately and to fight fairly.
- 16. **Dysfunctional:** We experience ourselves as inadequate parents.
Functional: We are coming to accept our limitations as parents.
- 17. **Dysfunctional:** We are ashamed of ourselves as couples.
Functional: We are proud of the progress we are making as couples.
- 18. **Dysfunctional:** We repeat patterns of dysfunction from our families of origin.
Functional: We are recognizing the patterns of dysfunction from our families of origin — and breaking them.

6. **Dysfunctional:** We find it difficult to ask for what we need, both individually and as couples.
Functional: We are learning that it is acceptable to ask for what we need, both individually and as couples.
7. **Dysfunctional:** Being sexual is equal to being intimate.
Functional: Being lovingly sexual can enhance our coupleships, but there are many additional ways of being intimate.
8. **Dysfunctional:** We either avoid our problems or feel we are individually responsible for solving the problems we have as couples.
Functional: We are learning to face our own problems but not to feel individually responsible for solving all the problems we have as couples. It is normal for couples to have problems that are not immediately resolvable.
9. **Dysfunctional:** We believe that we must agree on everything.
Functional: We are learning it isn't necessary to agree on everything to be happy.
10. **Dysfunctional:** We believe that we must enjoy the same things and have the same interests.
Functional: We are learning that we can have many different interests and still enjoy being together.
11. **Dysfunctional:** We believe that to be good couples we must be socially acceptable.
Functional: We believe that to be good couples we must be true to ourselves, to our coupleships, and to our principles.

1. *What is a recovering couple?*

The word "couple" is inclusive of any two adult people in a committed relationship without regard to legal status or sexual preference. A recovering couple is any partnership with a desire to remain committed to each other and to restore and build healthy communication, caring and greater intimacy. We are couples who suffer from many problems, some identified and some not, some treated and some not. We also come from many levels of brokenness, and we all seek healing in RCA.

2. *What is Recovering Couples Anonymous?*

Recovering Couples Anonymous is a Twelve-Step fellowship founded in the autumn of 1988. There are groups in many cities in the United States, Canada, and Europe. RCA is continuing to spread to other areas. Although there is no organizational affiliation with Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), our *Twelve Steps*, *Twelve Traditions*, and our *Twelve Concepts of Service* are adapted from A.A. Our primary purpose is to stay committed in loving and intimate relationships and to help other couples achieve freedom from addicted and destructive relationships. By using the tools of the program, we take individual responsibility for the well-being of our relationship, building new intimacy, and finding joy with each other.

We do not seek to blame our partner for the dysfunction of our current situation. Both of us bring expectations, family of origin messages, experiences of abuse, and individual coping mechanisms (including addictions) to the relationship. Through RCA we can begin anew!

3. What are the tools that help us in our recovery?

We have found that working the program means using the available tools one day at a time. The most important tool is attending RCA meetings. Here we learn how the program works, how to practice the Twelve Steps together as a couple, and how to replace old unhealthy behavior patterns with healthy ways of relating. We share our experience, strength, and hope with other couples. We learn how other couples have used RCA tools in their daily lives. The tools include the RCA Blue Book (Recovering Couples Anonymous), couple sponsors, developing a support system, conflict resolution contracts, reading literature, doing service, affirmations, playing together, resolving conflicts, and using the Safety Guidelines.

4. Do we attend only as a couple or separately?

RCA meetings are for both members of a couple. We think of our coupleship as a distinct entity with a separate life of its own

Characteristics of Functional and Dysfunctional Couples

- 1. Dysfunctional:*** Being together and unhappy is safer than being alone.
Functional: Being alone is comfortable, but working together can bring us greater joy and happiness. We are together because we want to be.
- 2. Dysfunctional:*** It is safer to be with other people than it is to be alone and intimate with our partners.
Functional: Being alone and intimate with our partners is becoming safe because we are learning to be open and honest.
- 3. Dysfunctional:*** If we really let our partners know what we have done or what we are feeling and thinking (who we are), we will be abandoned.
Functional: When we let our partners know what we have done or what we have been thinking (who we are), surprisingly, it is generally met with acceptance and actually increases our intimacy.
- 4. Dysfunctional:*** It is easier to hide or medicate our feelings through compulsive behaviors than it is to express them.
Functional: We are learning to express our feelings, no longer needing to hide or medicate them.
- 5. Dysfunctional:*** Being enmeshed and totally dependent on each other is perceived as being in love.
Functional: Being interdependent adds strength to our coupleship.

The Twelve Steps of RCA

1. We admitted we were powerless over our relationship— that our lives together had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to commitment and intimacy.
3. We made a decision to turn our wills and our life together over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our relationship together as a couple.
5. We admitted to God, to each other, and to another couple the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character, communication, and caring.
7. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it to our partner and to others we had harmed.
11. We sought through our common prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other couples, and to practice these principles in all aspects of our lives, our relationship, and our families.

(The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been adapted with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (“AAWS”). Permission to adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that Alcoholics Anonymous is affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only – use of A.A.’s Steps or an adapted version in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, or use in any other non-A.A. context, does not imply otherwise.)

that needs nurturing and development. The RCA symbol of the three-legged stool represents each partner’s individual recovery along with the recovery of the relationship as a whole. We believe that couple recovery stands like the stool when all three parts are working together.

There are times when both members cannot come to a meeting together, and it is usually possible for an individual partner to occasionally attend RCA recovery meetings alone. However, the program works only if both members are willing to work it. The Fourth Tradition states the principle that each group is autonomous and may identify its own guidelines as to whether the meeting is closed (couples only) or open to singles.

Meeting information is posted on the RCA website and is updated with information provided by the contact couple for each RCA group.

5. How can Recovering Couples Anonymous help our relationship?

In RCA we learn the many ways we have hurt ourselves and our coupleship. We often did not have the foundation or role models to help us know how to live in a healthy relationship. We recognize that neither our loves nor our relationships have been ideal. The RCA principles are tools that have been guides to spiritual progress,

rather than perfection. RCA helps us to help ourselves. We have found the support and hope in RCA to build deeper intimacy and to live free from destructive behavior.

6. *What happens at a meeting?*

There are suggested guidelines for RCA recovery meetings which may be adapted for each group's purpose. In general, each meeting opens with the Welcome, followed by the Serenity Prayer (using the plural form "we" and "us"). This is usually followed by the *Preamble*, *How It Works Part 1*, the *Twelve Steps*, *How It Works Part 2*, and the *Tradition of the Month*. The format of each meeting may include: a speaker couple, step-study, meditation, reflection, or other materials designed to foster couple recovery. Then usually after reading the Safety Guidelines the meeting will be open for sharing experience, strength, and hope. After one member of a couple shares, the other member may share or pass. We have learned that following the Safety Guidelines and avoiding crosstalk are essential. Cross-talk means any interaction or interruption that distracts attention from the sharing.

This includes vocalizations such as gasps, "ohs," dramatic facial expressions and body language, as well as verbally responding to the content. All sharing should be

23. *How can we, as a beginning couple, share our experience, strength, and hope?*

We learn from one another. Each of us is important. No one couple has all the answers. We listen to learn, and we learn to listen! When we share honestly and openly in front of our partners and other recovering couples, we grow together and learn intimacy and healthy ways of communicating. There are many opportunities for growth through 12-Step Service, giving back what has been given to us. Writing our story or an idea for the RCA Newsletter *Hand in Hand*; serving on one of the World Service Board committees; participating in local recovery service; and attending the International Convention are some of the many opportunities for service.

Join Us!

In RCA we are learning to cherish and enjoy our relationship with our life partner. We learn that our struggles and troubles are not unique. We gain hope and assurance that our own coupleship can recover and grow. With the aid of our Higher Power, we can restore commitment and intimacy to our relationship.

20. *Can we participate in RCA if we are separated, divorced, dating, gay or lesbian?*

Yes. The only requirement for membership in RCA is that you are a couple who desires to remain committed to each other and to restore a caring, committed, and intimate relationship. RCA has a diversity policy that prohibits discrimination.

21. *How do we become members of RCA?*

You are a member if you participate in the program. You do not have to sign up. There are no dues or fees. The Seventh tradition states: "Every RCA group should be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." Our voluntary contributions are used for rent, literature, supplies, and support of the RCA World Service Organization.

22. *Who runs the business of RCA?*

RCA is (forever) nonprofessional. Each group is autonomous. The Board of Trustees of the World Service Organization (WSO) is the governing body for the services provided to the RCA fellowship. The Board is elected on a rotating basis by the fellowship at the Annual International Convention. Along with the WSO Board, its service committees, and communications contractor, the RCA website serves as a virtual office, functioning as a contact point for distributing literature, answering questions, connecting couples with recovery meetings, and providing information to the public.

directed to the entire group and never to any specific individual, particularly a partner. A safe environment allows us the freedom to experience and share our pain, and to admit to one another the vulnerable and secret aspects of ourselves. The meeting generally closes with Twelve-Step related announcements, the Seventh Tradition, the *Promises* and a closing group prayer.

7. *What do couples speak about at an RCA meeting?*

Speaker couples at RCA meetings have been invited to share their relationship experience, strength and hope. Couple speakers are encouraged to recount their own unique couple story, and how the nature of their individual problems and addictions affected the relationship. We focus on our own coupleship issues and recovery rather than our partner's problems.

Other approaches may include: how you as a couple recognized your dysfunctions; how you got into couple recovery; how you are working the RCA Twelve Steps; your work with a sponsor couple or how building intimacy has been enhanced by attending RCA meetings, working the Steps and surrendering to your Higher Power.

Sharing hope is a wonderful speaker couple topic. How has your life improved since RCA? What difficulties do you continue to encounter? How are the Promises coming true in your coupleship? How are you developing couple friends in recovery and making time for your relationship in today's busy life?

Speakers often discover and share wonders and worries about themselves which they may not have previously acknowledged. Speaking at a meeting is a wonderful gift in your recovery.

8. *Do we have to be in conflict or have problems to participate in RCA?*

No. Some couples choose RCA in order to build healthy relationships from the beginning. None of us have had perfect families. Most of us have prior baggage. All of us will have struggles in our relationships. We need to learn to build on our strengths and seek support which will aid us during our inevitable struggles.

9. *What is sobriety in couple recovery?*

We define sobriety as the ability to remain committed to the relationship. We believe sobriety begins when we take and accept the First Step together: "We admitted we were powerless over our relationship and that our life together had become unmanageable."

regarding our real issues. The last thing we need is shared denial in couple recovery!

Some of the things we listen for are similar behaviors, and feelings. How did this person or that couple respond to a similar situation?

What changes were made by the speaker couple that we would like to happen to us? What action might we take based on information gained at this meeting? How has hearing another couple in similar circumstances calmed and reassured us? Many of us believe that our Higher Power frequently communicates through other couples' stories, insights, feelings and problems. Our coupleship is worthy of recovery brought on by listening well!

19. *What is meant by Higher Power?*

Step Two says: "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to commitment and intimacy." We understood that despite our best efforts, we needed help and that no human power could restore us to intimacy. Just as in individual recovery programs, each couple defines that power as they understand it together. It could be God, or a spiritual experience, even nature. There is room for any and every interpretation as long as it is spiritually significant for you.

boundaries. Worrying about what others think of us as a couple is called couple shame. Couple shame is common to many of us. Try to keep in mind that each couple attending an RCA meeting is there for a similar purpose.

17. What can we talk about at an RCA meeting?

Our focus is on sharing who we are as a couple, and how individual issues and addictions impact our relationship. We listen and speak respectfully to our partners and others. It is important to avoid self-righteous statements or taking our partner's inventory. We take ownership of our story as well as our reactions to our partner. We also take credit for our progress and work in recovery. Many of us have been crippled by shame or fear, and we find speaking among others difficult. It is important that each of us speak as soon as we feel that we are able. RCA members always try to accept each other as we are, unconditionally. And we each grow at our own pace.

18. How can listening help us?

Many of us have found that listening to our partner without interruption or preparing a rebuttal is extremely valuable! Listening increases understanding and empathy with our partner. Hearing other couples and our partner tends to build awareness and respect for differences. This acceptance and a willingness to listen help us avoid confusion

10. What is a slip or relapse in couple recovery?

A slip occurs when we question our commitment, refuse to accept mutual responsibility for our problems, get into blaming or judging behavior, violate the safety guidelines or stop working the program together. Usually, our communication has broken down, and we have distanced ourselves from each other through old coping mechanisms. A slip is a momentary lapse in progress, whereas a relapse is more serious and may require additional help.

11. After we leave the meeting, what happens then?

The best advice is to keep working the program. Sometimes an idea, thought, or question brought on by the meeting may arise later. It is important to respect our partner's boundaries, and to ask permission to talk about an issue. Each of us must feel safe so that openly sharing with each other will foster the trust and nurturing our relationship needs to grow and endure.

12. How do we know the RCA program will work for us? Can RCA save our relationship?

There are no guarantees. We have found that there are no problems that you have experienced that are not common to many of us. We recognize that the purpose of RCA is not to keep couples together at all costs.

Working the program as a couple may lead to the conclusion that it is healthiest to separate. The tools, the support, and the recovery experience are all there for you. The rest is up to each of you together and your Higher Power.

13. *Must you belong to another Twelve Step program to be in RCA?*

No. Although we strongly suggest that both members of a couple be in an individual recovery program as well as RCA, it is not a requirement for RCA membership. At a bare minimum, both members should be willing to learn more about the Twelve Step process. It is an important theme in RCA that both members of a couple take responsibility for the dysfunction of the relationship. However, we have found that individual recovery in any of the various Twelve Step fellowships does not necessarily promote couple recovery. But individual recovery usually tends to make couple recovery easier. A successful formula of RCA is: my individual recovery plus your individual recovery plus our couple recovery equals a healthy recovering coupleship. These three are all important factors in the serenity, stability, and intimacy we each seek.

14. *It's one thing for one of us to decide to participate, but how do we work the program together, especially if we are struggling?*

There are no simple answers to this question.

At times, one member is more willing to work on the relationship than the other. Sometimes, the best we can do is to attend RCA meetings, as we let our Higher Power and the fellowship show us the way. The program gives us the tools, but the choice is ours. We are here to support each other. RCA meetings are one means of nurturing our relationship and providing opportunities to connect with our partner as well as other couples.

15. *What is a sponsor couple and how do we choose them?*

A sponsor couple is another RCA recovering couple who shares with you their experience of working the Steps together. This couple can help you understand the RCA program, learn to use the tools, and just be there for you as a couple. You will want to find someone whose program is attractive to you, and with whom you are willing to be vulnerable, trusting, and sharing who you really are as a couple.

16. *What happens if we meet another couple we know at an RCA meeting?*

Anonymity is our spiritual foundation—providing a safe place to recover. Remember the slogan: “Who you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here.”

If you meet someone you know, it is important to practice mutual respect of