

**HOW TO UNDERSTAND AL-ANON:  
SPONSORSHIP  
William Doverspike, Ph.D.  
Drdoverspike.com**

*This article is one in a series about how Al-Anon works. Its purpose is to provide personal observations and a review of the literature that has been created and published by other authors. This article is educational in nature and is not intended for distribution, publication, or commercial use. Material cited or quoted in this paper is limited to the purposes of commentary, criticism, reporting, teaching, scholarship, or research in mutual-help groups.*

The title of this article is simply one I use in the document filing system for my articles that I post. There are no implications contained herein that this article has received—or that the author has applied for—Al-Anon Conference Approval. I make no claim that the contents, opinions, or statements expressed herein are free of error. In fact, my opinions may be wrong. I welcome any corrections, deletions, or edits in terms of any empirical or factual inaccuracies.

As a preface to understanding Al-Anon, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with Twelve Step recovery programs, it may be useful to review how Al-Anon works. The “Suggested Al-Anon Preamble to the Twelve Steps” provides this brief description that is read at the opening of almost all meetings:

“The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.

Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions.

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.”

(Al-Anon Family Groups, 2026, p. 11)

Newcomers to Al-Anon often think of meetings as a place where family members of alcoholics come in order to learn some ways they can get their loved ones to stop drinking. As they learn to apply the Twelve Steps to their own lives, many newcomers keep coming back for themselves. As old-timers<sup>1</sup> often disclose, “I came for someone else, but I stayed for myself.” In terms of the three stages of recovery, there is another adage: “I came for relief, but I stayed for recovery.” Just as the disease is progressive, recovery is also progressive. For those who stay for recovery, resilience and serenity are often found.

## Sponsorship

The best place to start is with a clear and simple definition of sponsorship: “Sponsorship is a confidential relationship between two Al-Anon members who benefit from sharing experience, strength, and hope” (Al-Anon, 2001, M-78).

### Attachment, Belonging, and Connection

Although the trifecta of attachment, belonging, and connection (ABCs) can occur during the relief stage of recovery, the restoration stage requires working the steps with a sponsor (Doverspike, 2024). During this stage, a person makes the crucial shift from only seeking relief to actually *being in recovery*.<sup>2</sup> Recovery is not only about *feeling* better; it is also about *functioning* better.

If relief is about feeling better and restoration is about functioning better, then resilience is about finding serenity. It is less about achieving serenity than experiencing it. Resilience is less about having serenity as a trait and more about maintaining serenity as a state of being. Resilience is the third stage of recovery—the default state of being happy, joyous, and free.

### Having a Sponsor

Whereas members in the *relief* stage use meetings as a place to share their problems, members in *recovery* are more likely to use meetings as a place to share their *progress*. As one member said it, “I take my progress to the meetings, and take my problems to my sponsor.” Over time, one not only discovers the value of having a sponsor but also the value of being a sponsor.

### Being a Sponsor

Whereas members in the recovery stage have sponsors, members in the resilience stage not only *have* sponsors but they also *serve* as sponsors. They have a sponsor line and network of Al-Pals. They sometimes present those they sponsor with sobriety chips or serenity coins.<sup>3</sup> Sponsors are more likely to have held a service position, not only in their home group but perhaps at a district level. Service can be as simple as arriving early, making coffee, setting out chairs, and setting out the literature. Yet the most valuable forms of service are the most basic: greeting newcomers with a smile, being fully present at meetings, and staying after a meeting to clean up the room and put up the chairs.

### Support and Structure

This article began as an exchange with a close friend who mentors and sponsors others. He shared what he described as a dilemma when assisting others in deepening and strengthening their spirituality: “I find situations like this with men I sponsor difficult because I feel as though there is a double bind. On one hand, I need to hold them accountable and guide them and, on the other, I need to let them develop their beliefs at their own pace” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 03, 2026).

This sponsor’s description reflects a dialectic of sponsorship. It involves maintaining the balance of two basic tasks of good parenting. The balance of these tasks is also one of the important dimensions of being a counselor or psychotherapist.

Based on the original work and research of developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind, Ph.D. (1927–2018), the dimensions of *support* and *structure* are the foundation of a two-factor model of parenting (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1971, 1972, 1991). The two factors are listed below, with bullets rather than numbers in order to emphasize that both factors are equally important:

- ☑ **Support** (nurturing, mentoring, encouraging, consoling)
- ☑ **Structure** (controls, demands, expectations, regulations, rules)

Figure 1 illustrates how these two variables can form a 2 x 2 factorial matrix, which depicts four types of parenting styles:

**Figure 1**  
*Support and Structure in Parenting Styles*

		Support	
		Low	High
Structure	Low	Low Support Low Structure	High Support Low Structure
	High	Low Support High Structure	High Support High Structure

Note. Adapted from Baumrind (1967, 1972)

- ✓ **High structure / Low support:** The “authoritarian” or “autocratic” style of parenting is cold, controlling, and strict. “Brickwall” (Colorosso, 1994) or “dictatorial” parents often raise children who develop conduct problems or other disruptive behavior disorders.
- ✓ **Low structure / High support:** The “permissive” style of parenting is lenient and undemanding. “Jellyfish” parents often raise children who develop blurred boundaries and confusion.
- ✓ **High structure / High support:** The “authoritative” style of parenting is fair, firm, and nurturing. “Backbone” parents often raise secure children who develop behavioral adaptiveness and emotional flexibility.

Notwithstanding the education, training, and supervised experiences that counselors, psychologists, and psychotherapists undergo, at least some of their style is influenced by the parenting style that was prominent in their families of origin. Given that sponsors do not undergo any type of formal training to become sponsors, albeit they are influenced by their experiences with their own sponsors, it is plausible that the two factors of support and structure may be applicable in considering best practices as a sponsor. Balance and flexibility are relevant in the art of sponsorship. There are times when a sponsee may need more support and other times when more structure may be beneficial.

- ✓ **Low structure / Low support:** The “neglectful” style of parenting is unengaged and uninvolved. Neglectful parents often raise children who develop anxiety and depressive disorders. Neglectful parenting is associated with the worst outcomes (Sternberg, 2001).

### Attachment Prototypes

Another construct that may be relevant to sponsorship is the idea of *attachment prototypes*. This concept may be useful when considering four basic types of sponsees, although it is obvious that there are more than four types of sponsees.

The concept of attachment prototypes originated with the work of the renowned British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1907–1990). Best known as the founder of attachment theory, Bowlby (1966, 1977; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) proposed that the emotional bond between a child and their primary caregiver is essential for healthy social and emotional development. His work was expanded by psychology professor Leonard Horowitz (1937–2019) and later by applied social psychologist Kim Bartholomew (see Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

A basic principle of *attachment theory* is that early relationships with caregivers provide the prototype for later *social relations*. Bartholomew (1990) challenged the categorical view of attachment in adults and proposed a more dimensional model. For Bartholomew, adult attachment is best described as varying along two dimensions: attachment-related *anxiety* and attachment-related *avoidance*. Bartholomew’s (1990) model differentiates two forms of adult avoidance of intimacy: (1) a *fearful style* is characterized by a conscious desire for social contact that is inhibited by fears of its consequences, and (2) a *dismissing style* is characterized by a defensive denial of the need or desire for greater social contact.

Bartholomew’s (1990) distinction corresponds to two differing models of the self: “People who fearfully avoid intimacy view themselves as undeserving of the love and support of others, and people who dismiss intimacy possess a positive model of the self that minimizes the subjective awareness of distress or social needs” (p. 147). With regard to working models of self and others, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed four adult attachment styles: secure, dismissive, preoccupied, and fearful. I often use the term “balanced” rather than “secure.”

Figure 2 illustrates how these two variables can form a 2 x 2 factorial matrix, which illustrates a four-category conceptualization of attachment styles. This figure is contained in Meredith et al. (2011, p. 161):

**Figure 2**

*Four Categories of Attachment (adapted from Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)*

		Relationship Anxiety	
		Low	High
Relationship Avoidance	Low	Secure (balanced)	Support Seeking (preoccupied)
	High	Self-Reliant (dismissing)	Cautious (fearful)

Note. Adapted from Meredith (2011, p. 161) <sup>4</sup>

- ✓ **Secure Attachment:** Securely-attached individuals are comfortable with autonomy and intimacy. They can balance dependence and independence in their relationships.

- ✓ **Dismissive Attachment:** The dismissive style, known as “avoidant” in children, is characterized by a strong sense of self-sufficiency, often to the point of appearing compulsively self-reliant (i.e., “counterdependent”). These individuals may value their independence so much that they downplay or seem uninterested in close relationships. They may seem aloof, detached, or distant from others.
- ✓ **Preoccupied Attachment:** Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style, known as “anxious” in children, crave intimacy and closeness. They can be overly dependent, highly emotionally reactive, and demanding in relationships.
- ✓ **Fearful Attachment:** Individuals with a fearful attachment style, known as “disorganized” or “fearful avoidant” in children, desire close relationships but they avoid intimacy because they fear rejection. They may even believe they are worthy of rejection. They feel vulnerable and have high emotional reactivity. They behave unpredictably in relationships due to their internal conflict between a desire for intimacy and a fear of it.

Whereas the preoccupied-anxious and dismissive-avoidant styles have more negative impacts than the secure attachment, the fearful-avoidant style is generally considered to be the most maladaptive of the four types (see Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Maunder & Hunter, 2012; Caspers et al., 2006).

### Internal Working Models of Self and Others

The four prototypic attachment patterns (Bartholomew, 1990, Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) represent the intersection of the two dimensions of *self* and *other*. The internal working model of self (dependence) and others (avoidance) can have positive or negative implications. The two dimensions and their associated prototypes are listed below, although a more detailed explanation and a figural illustration are contained in Figure 1 (Bartholomew’s two-dimensional model of attachment) of Henderson et al. (2005, p. 220).

- ☑ **Self:** A positive model of self (often seen in Secure and Dismissive types) is associated with self-confidence, whereas a negative model of self (often seen in Preoccupied and Fearful types) is associated with anxiety.
- ☑ **Others:** A positive model of others (often seen in Secure and Preoccupied types) is associated with seeking out others, whereas a negative model of others (often seen in Dismissive and Fearful types) is associated with avoiding intimacy.

### Codependence and Counterdependence

Preoccupied-anxious individuals are the most likely to become codependent. As “givers” or caretakers, they fear abandonment and seek validation by over-functioning in relationships, neglecting their own needs to please others. A self-defeating cycle is sustained when an anxious person pairs with an avoidant-dismissive counterdependent person (creating a “giver-taker” dynamic).

### A Model of Sponsorship

As a starting point when discussing any conceptual model, it is important to remember the adage of the British statistician George Box, Ph.D. (1953, Mathematics Genealogy, University of London) who wrote the famous line: “All models are wrong, some are useful” (1976, p. 972). His point was that we should focus more on whether something can be applied to everyday life in a useful manner rather than debating endlessly whether an answer is correct in all cases.

The following ideas comprise a purely speculative model that is not based on empirical research. The components of this model are offered merely as ideas for commentary, criticism, and discussion. Although there are many types of sponsees, this article includes only four types based on the attachment prototypes.

#### Four Types of Sponsees

- ✓ **Secure Attachment:** Securely-attached individuals are comfortable with autonomy as well as closeness and intimacy. They are able to balance dependence and independence in their relationships. Attachment styles are not the sole determinant of success in working a twelve-step program with a sponsor. Nevertheless, if all other factors are equal, secure attachment contributes to an ideal sponsee. Secure attachment in a sponsor contributes to good sponsorship. An ideal scenario consists of secure attachment in both sponsor and sponsee.
- ✓ **Dismissive Attachment:** Dismissive individuals may have such a strong sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency that they may not even seek out sponsors. Individuals who do seek sponsors may hold back interpersonally and isolate themselves. At worst, they may reflect the “ism” of alcoholism (i.e., “I sponsor Myself”). At best, when they do work with sponsors, these sponsees may be “low maintenance” and may not contact their sponsors regularly. An ideal sponsor may need to reach out to the avoidant sponsee and have realistic expectations that the sponsee may remain somewhat distant. Best practices for a sponsor include avoiding “crowding” or “hovering” of the sponsee while maintaining connection at just the right distance.
- ✓ **Preoccupied Attachment:** Individuals with an anxious attachment style may crave closeness, desire intimacy, and seek reassurance from their sponsors. They can be overly dependent and even demanding in relationships. In some ways, they may be “high maintenance” and may contact their sponsors very regularly. An ideal sponsor establishes reasonable expectations, sets healthy limits, and maintains appropriate boundaries.
- ✓ **Fearful Attachment:** Individuals with a fearful-avoidant style may desire close relationships, but they fear intimacy, closeness, and vulnerability. Individuals with fearful attachment

experience intense internal conflict. This conflict, between a desire for intimacy and a fear of it, manifests as inconsistency, unpredictability, and instability in relationships with others—including sponsors. As a result, fearful-avoidant individuals may have had—and may continue to have—a series of unsatisfactory, unsuccessful, or unrewarding relationships with sponsors. In contrast to other attachment prototypes, fearful-avoidant individuals may have the poorest outcomes.

### Support and Structure in Sponsorship

Extrapolating from Baumrind’s (1966) two-factor model of structure and support, one might speculate that these two factors are important in a sponsoring relationship. Although there are many types of sponsors, this model presents only four types, which are based on the four basic parenting styles.

- ☑ **Support** (nurturing, mentoring, encouraging, consoling)
- ☑ **Structure** (controls, demands, expectations, regulations, rules)

Figure 3 shows how these two variables can form a 2 x 2 factorial matrix, which depicts four types of sponsoring styles:

**Figure 3**  
*Support and Structure in Sponsoring Styles*

		Support	
		Low	High
Structure	Low	Neglectful Sponsor	Loving Sponsor
	High	Bossy Sponsor	Authentic Sponsor

*Note.* Adapted from Doverspike (2026)

### Four Types of Sponsors

- ✓ **Low structure / Low support:** “Neglectful” sponsors may be disengaged, unengaged, or uninvolved, providing neither much support nor much structure.
- ✓ **High structure / Low support:** “Bossy” sponsors may be controlling and domineering in providing advice and telling sponsees what to do.
- ✓ **Low structure / High support:** “Loving” sponsors are accepting and caring, without imposing demands on the relationship. This style is described in *Courage to Change*: “Someone who demonstrates unconditional love and still takes care of his or her own needs and who offers support without telling me what to do can be a wonderful role model” (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1992, p. 363).
- ✓ **High structure / High support:** “Authentic” sponsors may provide an ideal balance between support and structure, at times providing more support and at other times providing more structure.

### Examples of Sponsee Reactions

- ✓ **Neglectful:** The sponsee of a neglectful sponsor might say, "Talking with my sponsor is like talking to a wall."
- ✓ **Bossy:** The sponsee of a bossy sponsor might say, "My sponsor tells me what to do and is quick to give advice."
- ✓ **Loving:** The sponsee of a loving sponsor might say, "He never told me what to do; he never told me what to say. He just called and left messages of 'Peace,' 'Have a good day;' or 'Keep coming to meetings.' One day he even emailed me a prayer" (Bill D., 1997, p. 29).
- ✓ **Authentic:** The sponsee of an authentic sponsor might say, "My sponsor really listens, understands me, and gives me feedback when I ask."

### Support and Structure in Working the Steps

- ✓ **Step 1:** Given that most newcomers do not come into Al-Anon on a winning streak, they may initially benefit from a strong dose of support for taking the first step in admitting their powerlessness. Structure can wait.
- ✓ **Step 2:** The process of first coming, and then later coming to believe, is a behavioral and then cognitive transition in which a sponsor's support is relevant. Ideal sponsors avoid too much structure at this point. They may share, but do not impose their own religious or spiritual beliefs regarding a "Power greater than ourselves."

- ✓ **Step 3:** Making a decision requires a sponsor's support and patience. Too much structure at this point can result in reactance and regression on the part of a sponsee.
- ✓ **Step 4:** Making a "searching and fearless moral inventory" is the step for which structure becomes important and possibly mandatory. Whether one uses the original or revised *Blueprint for Progress* (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1987, 2004), the Fourth Step involves a structure.
- ✓ **Step 5:** Admitting "the exact nature of our wrongs" requires self-awareness, courage, and a sponsor. Preparation is done by completing a Fourth Step, inventory which requires some degree of structure. Disclosing one's secrets and wrongs to another person requires trust and deserves strong support.
- ✓ **Step 6:** The process of becoming "entirely ready" is often facilitated by a sponsor's guidelines and structure.
- ✓ **Step 7:** As one adopts a posture of humility, this step usually deserves more support than structure.
- ✓ **Step 8:** Whether one makes a list using the *Blueprint for Progress* (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1987, 2004) or the five-column method in *Paths to Recovery* (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters (1997, p. 81), making a list involves structure. The Eighth Step's other component ("became willing") requires support. <sup>5</sup>

- ✓ **Step 9:** In one sense, the Ninth Step is “where we go public” with the program. Making direct amends can involve complexities and dilemmas for which a sponsor’s input can be valuable in terms of avoiding further harms or injuries to others. <sup>6</sup>
- ✓ **Step 10:** When it comes to the so-called “maintenance steps,” a sponsor’s own actions may provide the best example for others. Sponsors who continue to take their own inventories and admit when they were wrong are more likely to model such behavior for others.
- ✓ **Step 11:** Navigating life without the Eleventh Step prayer would be like piloting a ship without a rudder. While providing structure by directing sponsees to literature on meditation and prayer, ideal sponsors do not impose their own prayers on others. Al-Anon literature is filled with examples of application of the Eleventh Step. <sup>7</sup>
- ✓ **Step 12:** One perspective of the Twelfth Step is that we carry the message to others by practicing these principles in all our affairs. The only way to keep it is to give it away, which can be enhanced by sharing experience, strength, and hope with a sponsor.

### Carrying the Message

- ✓ Remembering that carrying the message and practicing the principles involves many actions
- ✓ Encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives (Tradition 5)
- ✓ Welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics (Tradition 5)
- ✓ Attending meetings, seeing others, and being seen by others
- ✓ Arriving early to greet newcomers with a warm smile
- ✓ Making coffee, arranging chairs, setting out the literature
- ✓ Saying “yes” when asked to do service work such as speaking at a meeting
- ✓ Offering to give a ride to someone who otherwise would not be able to attend
- ✓ Speaking in meetings and listening to others when they share
- ✓ Speaking up during group conscience meetings
- ✓ Setting an example through actions and words
- ✓ Making a call to give a word of encouragement or understanding
- ✓ Returning a call to someone who needs experience, strength, and hope
- ✓ Staying after a meeting to answer questions and talk with newcomers
- ✓ Cleaning up, putting up the chairs, and storing the literature

## Notes

1. Although Alcoholics Anonymous uses the endearing term *oldtimer* to refer to a member with long term sobriety, Al-Anon began using the politically correct term *longtimer*. By whatever names called, both have unique values as reflected in the following adage:

“Newcomers tell me where I’ve been.  
Oldtimers tell me where I am going.  
And a sponsor tells me where I am.”  
Anonymous

2. When referring to the three stages of recovery (relief, restoration, resilience), I often refer to this stage as *restoration*, as it is implied in Step 2 (“Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity”). Restoration is not a guaranteed outcome, the implication is that it is possible that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us. We have to do our part, by working the steps with a sponsor and by practicing the principles of the program. The underlying assumption is that the recovery involves restoration, which itself requires work to restore something to a better condition. An analogy might be the process of restoration that requires removal of oxidation or defects that otherwise cover a valuable coin or a precious gem. Once restored—with the defects removed—the object shines brightly. The process of removing defects is made explicit in Step 6 (“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character”). The theological implication of Step 6 is that we are created without defects.

3. Sobriety chips are used in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) but not in Al-Anon. Often engraved with the Serenity Prayer on the back, the tokens are small plastic (or sometimes metal) objects that are variously called chips, coins, or medallions. There is no official AA chip or medallion and they are not officially conference approved nor has the AA logo been granted for use on the medallions.

From a historical perspective, it was a nun named Sister Ignatia, who worked alongside Dr. Bob at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, Ohio, who is usually credited with starting the tradition of sobriety medallions. By asking the patients to return the medal before drinking, she created a physical pause and a reminder of their commitment to sobriety and God. This history is recorded in *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (1980, p. 195):

“Sister Ignatia gave each of her newly released patients a Sacred Heart medallion, which she asked them to return before they took the first drink. She would occasionally give out St. Christopher medals as well, but she would tell the recipient not to drive too fast. ‘He gets out after 50 miles an hour,’ she warned.”  
(Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980, p. 195).

The actual history of how the AA chip evolved after Sister Ignatia is shrouded in mystery. It is believed to have originated in 1942 in Indianapolis by Doherty S., who began an AA group in Indianapolis and is thought to have started the sobriety coin tradition in this AA group (Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.). An AA group in Portland, Maine, may have begun the tradition of using colored poker chips to mark time of sobriety.

Although there are some regional differences, these are the colors and their usual meaning in AA culture: White chip (a “surrender chip” for starting or renewing commitment), silver (24 hours or the desire to stay sober for the next day), red (30 days or 1 month), gold (60 days or 2 months), green (90 days or 3 months), dark blue (6 months) and bronze (1 year and subsequent years, though designs vary). As one observer has noted about the bronze coins for multiple years, “The chip is not for you – it’s for the newcomer” (Richard T., personal communication, January 03, 2026).

A few Al-Anon groups, mostly men’s meetings, give bronze Serenity Coins to mark the number of years the person has been a member of Al-Anon. In contrast to the criterion of abstinence from alcohol, Al-Anon members do not have an actual gauge of serenity. Many members think the use of such coins in Al-Anon is meaningless.

4. The term “balanced” is not used in the figures of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) or in the Meredith et al. (2011, p. 161, Figure 1) article. I use the term in my adaptation of Patricia Meredith’s figure to highlight the balance of dependence and independence.

5. The following description from *Paths to Recovery* is sometimes called “the five-column method” of making an Eighth Step list. Table 1 provides an illustration of this description:

“How do I make a list? One member shares that she made the following column heads: the person harmed, their relationship to me, my harmful act, the reason for my amends, and my willingness. It is here that she transferred the names from the Fourth Step inventory and began adding new ones.”  
(Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1997, p. 81)

**Table 1**  
*The Five-Column Method for the Eighth Step*

The person harmed	Their relationship to me	My harmful act	The reason for my amends	My willingness
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Adapted from Al-Anon (1997, p. 81)

The “three-column method” discussed in *Paths to Recovery* provides some structure for developing willingness to complete the Eighth Step list. Willingness to make amends begins with a list of the people to whom we can make amends now. Through the process of building spiritual strength, we eventually move people on the “later” list to the “now” list. With greater willingness, we may eventually move people on the “never” list to the “later” list. This process is described in more detail in *Paths to Recovery* (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1997, p. 82) and in “How to Make Amends” (Doverspike, 2015, p. 4). Table 2 provides an illustration:

**Table 2**  
*The Three-Column Method for the Eighth Step*

Now	Later	Never
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Adapted from Doverspike (2011, Slide. 358)

Another “three-column method” discussed in *Paths to Recovery* provides additional structure for completing an Eighth Step list. Figure 3 provides an illustration:

**Table 3**  
*The Three-Column Method for the Eighth Step*

Whom I have harmed	How I have harmed	“Appropriate” amends
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Adapted from Al-Anon (1997, p. 85)

6. When working Step Nine, one purpose of using a sponsor when making amends is to avoid further harm to the person for whom we are making amends in the first place. We make direct amends “except when to do so would injure them or others.”

7. The following description from Al-Anon’s *Twelve Steps and Traditions* provides an example of one person’s experience with the Eleventh Step.

“Some of us were amazed to find an idea flashing into our minds that we’d never thought of before, along with the conviction that it was the right answer. Having received such unexpected guidance, we could also believe that we would be given ‘the power to carry that out.’”

(Al-Anon, 1981, p. 70-71)

### Acknowledgements

### Dedication

**Gary Neidhardt.** I would like to express my appreciation to author and historian Gary Neidhardt for providing information, inspiration, and insight into the early history of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon Family Groups. Gary is not only the author of several books that reflect meticulous research and eloquent command of the English language, he is one of the few excellent writers who can also write computer code.

**Deborah Midkiff.** I would like to express my appreciation to book editor, counselor, and spiritual director Deborah Midkiff, MS, NCC, SD, for providing text editing and proofreading of this manuscript. Because Deborah is an avid reader who has been assessed as having a 40,000 word vocabulary, she was also helpful in providing some margin notes with alternative word choices.

This article is dedicated to the anonymous sponsor mentioned on page 2 of this article. He is an authentic sponsor who knows how to balance the two dimensions of structure and support in his work with others. He is also a living example of the Al-Anon definition of sponsorship: "Sponsorship is a confidential relationship between two Al-Anon members who benefit from sharing experience, strength, and hope" (Al-Anon, 2001, M-78).

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Here is a quote about the Eleventh Step:  
“Some of us were amazed to find an idea flashing into our minds that we’d never thought of before, along with the conviction that it was the right answer. Having received such unexpected guidance [71], we could also believe that we would be given ‘the power to carry that out.’” (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1981, p. 70-71)
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Here is a noteworthy quote:  
“How do I make a list? One member shares that she made the following column heads: the person harmed, their relationship to me, my harmful act, the reason for my amends, and my willingness. It is here that she transferred the names from the Fourth Step inventory and began adding new ones.” (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1997, p. 81)
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Page 12 contains the “Suggested Al-Anon Preamble to the Twelve Steps.” Page 20 contains the “Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon,” and page 21 lists them in the order in which they appear in the pamphlet. This text of the three obstacles is from the pamphlet, *Alcoholism, the Family Disease* (P-4), © Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., Virginia, 2005.
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The 2026-2029 edition of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) replaces any previous editions. Page 11 contains the “Suggested Al-Anon Preamble to the Twelve Steps.” Page 20 contains “The Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon.”

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**Appendix A**  
**Attachment Prototypes**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Secure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Attuned to emotions and feelings</li> <li>✓ Capable of trusting others fairly easily</li> <li>✓ Capable of being emotionally close to others</li> <li>✓ Can communicate frustrations directly</li> <li>✓ Leads with cooperative and flexible behavior in relationships</li> <li>✓ Open and comfortable interacting with others</li> <li>✓ No significant problems with separation from others</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Preoccupied</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Has a sensitive nervous system</li> <li>✓ Struggles communicating needs directly</li> <li>✓ Strong desire for closeness and dependency on others</li> <li>✓ Desire to be exceptionally close to others</li> <li>✓ May want to spend more and more time with a significant person</li> <li>✓ Tends to act out when triggered by someone or something</li> <li>✓ It is as if a preoccupied child would gladly go home with the counselor or teacher.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Dismissive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Apparent disinterest in being emotionally close to others</li> <li>✓ Disinterest must be distinguished from fear</li> <li>✓ Downplays importance of relationships</li> <li>✓ Usually extremely autonomous and self-reliant</li> <li>✓ Strong desire to feel independent and self-sufficient</li> <li>✓ Prone to emotional distancing from others</li> <li>✓ Can become more vulnerable when there is a crisis</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fearful</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ More dependent in relationships (than is the avoidant/dismissive type)</li> <li>✓ Usually has strong fears of being rejected</li> <li>✓ Often has low self-esteem</li> <li>✓ Experiences high anxiety in relationships</li> <li>✓ Usually has a history of being close and then feeling hurt by others</li> <li>✓ May act disinterested in order to be self-protective</li> <li>✓ Desires to be close, but fearful of being hurt</li> <li>✓ Often occurs in children in foster care</li> <li>✓ Fearful children may put others through subtle tests of trust</li> </ul>

*Note:* Adapted from Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991)

**Appendix B  
Parenting Styles**

		<b>Support: Warmth, Responsiveness, and Nurturance</b>	
		<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Structure: Expectations and Demands</b>	<b>Low</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Neglectful Parent</b></p> <p>Neglectful (aka, unengaged, disengaged) parents do not provide support or nurturance, nor do they place demands, expectations, or rules on their children. They have low expectations and little warmth. This style of parenting is usually associated with the poorest outcomes. Children of neglectful parents tend to either isolate or withdraw from others or they dependently gravitate toward others who provide support.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Permissive Parent</b></p> <p>At best, these parents act in accepting, affirmative, and nonpunitive ways towards their child’s actions, impulses, and desires. They have great warmth for individuality but low expectations. At worst, permissive parents can be “jellyfish” or “wishy-washy” parents who have difficulty clearly setting and enforcing boundaries, expectations, and rules. At best, children of permissive parents may have a strong sense of autonomy and individuality. At worst, these children may rule the house and may even become self-indulgent or promiscuous. The “spoiled” child may have permissive parents.</p>
	<b>High</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Authoritarian Parent</b></p> <p>At best, authoritarian (aka, “autocratic” or “brickwall”) parents are strict, controlling, and punitive in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, which may be theologically motivated. At worst, they make many rules that are “etched in stone” and they govern the home in a dictatorial “my way or the highway” style. Abusive parents often fall into this style, although it is important to emphasize that <u>not</u> all authoritarian parents are abusive. At best, their children learn to passively submit to authority or to rebel through passive-aggression (reactance, opposition, or negativism). At worst, their children may act out behaviorally. The “estranged” child often has autocratic parents.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Authoritative Parent</b></p> <p>Authoritative (aka, “backbone”) parents set reasonable rules, govern equitably, listen to their child’s ideas, and remain in a position of final benevolent authority. Parents have high expectations and great warmth for the individuality of their children. Supportive, encouraging, and respectful parents provide consistency, open communication, and few but principled rules. Being an effective parent means guiding a child toward independent adulthood. Children of authoritative parents learn to cooperate, dialogue, and negotiate with their parents and with others.</p>

*Note.* Adapted from Baumrind (1966)

**Appendix B  
Sponsor Styles**

		<b>Support: Warmth, Responsiveness, and Nurturance</b>	
		<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Structure: Controls, Demands, and Expectations</b>	<b>Low</b>	<p><b>Neglectful Sponsor</b> Neglectful (aka, unengaged, disengaged) sponsors do not provide support nor do they place demands or expectations on their sponsees. At best, they may be physically present when needed. At worst, they may be emotionally absent when needed.</p> <p>Sponsees of neglectful sponsors may isolate or withdraw from their sponsors. At best, these sponsees may feel like something is missing. They may eventually gravitate toward others who provide more support and structure. At worst, particularly if a parent was neglectful, they may feel abandoned.</p>	<p><b>Loving Sponsor</b> Loving sponsors are affirming and encouraging with their sponsees. At best, these sponsors provide support. At worst, they may be laissez-faire or permissive in their approach, which may lack direction and expectations.</p> <p>Sponsees of loving sponsors feel affirmed and supported. At best, they may experience a sense of unconditional positive regard and may be motivated by the positive reinforcement they receive. At worst, they may lack structure and become lax or unfocused in working the steps.</p>
	<b>High</b>	<p><b>Bossy Sponsor</b> Bossy sponsors have strict directives and rigid rules about how they want their sponsees to work the steps. They might even “fire” a sponsee who does not conform to their demands.</p> <p>Sponsees of bossy sponsors may learn to incorporate the principles of the program by conforming to their sponsor’s directives. At best, these sponsees may passively submit to directives until they can internalize structure. At worst, they may rebel through passive-aggressive behavior (reactance, opposition, or negativism).</p>	<p><b>Authentic Sponsor</b> Authentic sponsors set reasonable expectations, establish fair boundaries, listen to their sponsees, and provide practical feedback and wisdom.</p> <p>Sponsees of authentic sponsors may learn to cooperate and negotiate with their sponsors and with others. At best, they experience a sense of competence and progress. At worst, they view their sponsors as the final authority, which highlights the importance of the adage “Principles above personalities.”</p>

*Note.* Adapted from Doverspike (2026)

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