



# Recovery Circles for People with Compulsive Food Behaviors

Recovery Circles (RCs) are small groups of people who come together to support each other's recovery and abstinence.

*Recovery Circles are NOT intended to be a substitute for sponsors, accountability buddies, meetings, or any other type of support. It is simply another way to add to your recovery team.*

## Starting a group

Setting up a Recovery Circle from scratch usually requires one person to make the decision to do it and see it through to the first meeting. You could:

**Reach out.** Notice people in meetings that you think may be kindred spirits or good to work with, collect their contact details, and ask if they'd like to discuss setting up a Recovery Circle.

**Announce your interest at meetings.** Use the Chat box. It might be as simple as "I want to create a Recovery Circle on Tuesdays or Thursdays after dinner (7pm Eastern Time). Contact me at ...,"

**Apply for a free Zoom room.** Secular Overeaters offers free Zoom rooms for secular recovery circles: <https://bit.ly/SO-ZoomRoomApplication>

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## Your first Recovery Circle

The meeting should cover:

**Who hosts the circle.** One person needs to organize how the RC meets (e.g., face-to-face or Zoom id), set up a

WhatsApp group, monitor time sharing during the meeting (or ask someone else to), and summarize the week's actions. Like any other service role this can be passed to another RC member after a period of service. The timekeeper maintains the pace.

**When to meet.** Day and time of the week or month the circle meets.

**Where to meet.** Face to face location or Zoom (or other video medium).

**The focus.** Abstinence and recovery (enablers/challenges/blocks).

**The ground rules.** Helpful behaviors, and factors that matter to your group. You may have a special focus or peer factors like:

100-pounders	Vegans
Bulimics	LGBTQ
Gender	Early birds
BiPOC	Night owls
Age ranges	Trauma survivors

**How many should participate.** A nice size is 3-6 people. If you have fewer than three, do you want to invite more? Two people could choose to be "Ac-

countability Buddies” and then recruit others at some later date—or not! The twosome might also evolve into co-sponsoring.

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## **Suggested guidelines for Recovery Circles**

**Meet regularly** (in person or virtually) once a week, every other week, or once a month as agreed.

**Show up on time.** Each member should make attendance a high priority. Even when all you want to do is hide. If you can’t make it, say so beforehand (e.g., send a message to your WhatsApp group).

**Be present.** If Zoom or similar medium is used, your video should be on to stay focused unless the group feels otherwise.

**Respect anonymity and confidentiality.** Unless you brought it here, let it stay here.

**Feedback.** Decide if your group will offer feedback, and allow each member to decide for themselves as they share. Feedback should always be intended to support each sharer’s recovery. The focus should be less on telling our own stories and more on providing support and guidance to the person sharing.

The members giving feedback can do so in turn or in a group dialogue with the member whose turn it is. Feedback should be focused and concise. Detailed personal experience can be shared one on one at another time if the various members choose.

Our upbringing may have included people who listened to agree or listened to disagree. It is harder to listen to understand, and Recovery Circles are a great place to practice.

## **Reminders of helpful behaviors**

- Honesty
- Respectful
- Helpful
- Kind
- Compassionate
- Non-judgmental
- Focused
- Concise

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## **Topics**

**Focus on a recovery topic** to avoid becoming a purely social gathering. Focuses can include:

**Our life stories.** Each person in turn shares their life story focusing on how their relationship with food has been at different times in their life. Take some time in the preceding week to prepare what you want to say.

**Our plans of eating.** Take turns sharing what works for you.

**Our action plans.** Brainstorm ideas to deal with specific situations, like potlucks, going out with friends, or holidays.

**A secular book, news article or podcast.**

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## **Special circumstances**

**If a member is having a crisis** (death of a loved one, significant health challenge, divorce, food relapse, or job loss), they

may ask for a longer group with extra time for them or even an extra meeting which only focuses on them for that situation. The others can decide to offer it without a request. But in general, be cautious in shifting away from equal time.

**If someone leaves,** and the group agrees to add a new member, revisit the factors that matter (e.g., does the group still want to be men-only). Are the former ideas still relevant? There should also be complete consensus on who to invite.

Each group is completely autonomous and can disband at any time.

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## **In closing**

The purpose of a Recovery Circle is to support your recovery; the group is always free to change any of the suggestions above.

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## **Sample Group: Focus on Abstinence and Recovery**

The purpose of this Recovery Circle is to meet monthly and to answer these two questions:

1. How is your abstinence/relationship with food going?  
(What is working or not working and what needs more attention?)
2. How is your recovery going? In other words, how's the rest of your life?  
(What is working or not working, what needs more attention?)

**Divide the time among members and track the time** to make sure it is shared evenly. Select a timekeeper at the beginning of the meeting to remind members when their time is up.

**Ask for what you need.** Each member can use their time as they so choose, typically in one of the following ways:

“I just need to be heard this week.”  
The member uses all the time to share what they need to.

“I'd value your suggestions.”  
The member uses part of the time to share and part for feedback from the group.

“I'm struggling with xyz, how have you dealt with that?”  
The member uses part of the time to share and part for input from the group.

**Before closing the meeting, the host (or each member) summarizes the action** each member will focus on for the upcoming month (examples: walking each day, not eating a specific food, or writing their intentions at the start of each day).