



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 or Growing 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 or on Facebook. Use the Chat box or let people know during the announcements. 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 ...". You can also join the private Secular Overeaters and Friends (in Overeaters Anonymous) Facebook group and post an announcement there.

Apply for a free Zoom room. Secular Overeaters offers free Zoom rooms for secular recovery circles:

<https://bit.ly/SO-ZoomRoomApplication>

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, Zoom, or FaceTime), set up a WhatsApp or group text or email, monitor time sharing during the meeting (or ask someone else to), collect everyone's contact information (to share with the group), 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), recovery literature or a 12-Step Study.

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

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/text group).

Be present. If Zoom or similar medium is used, your video should be on to stay focused and to let others get to know you better (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.

Outside contact. Decide how much contact you want to have as a group between meetings and remember to not “reply all” to emails if you’re just communicating with one of the members.

Reminders of helpful behaviors

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

Topics

Focus on a recovery topic to avoid becoming a purely social gathering or political discussion group. Topics 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.

Special Circumstances

If a member is having a crisis (death of a loved one, significant health challenge, relationship change, food relapse, or job loss), they may ask the group to extend the meeting to give them extra time or they could even set up an extra meeting which only focuses on them for that situation. The others can also decide to offer it without a request. But in general, be cautious in shifting away from equal time.

Special circumstances continues

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, does the day/time still work, are the former ideas still relevant?). There should also be complete consensus on who to invite.

If you decide to leave, it is important to exit the group in a kind, respectful way. If possible, give the group some notice and acknowledge how the group has helped you and wish the others well.

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

In Closing

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

Sample Group: Focus on Abstinence and Recovery

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

1. What's going well in your recovery?
2. What could be going better?
3. What changes could you make to your program?
4. What support do you need to follow through?

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).

Notes