

REFUGE RECOVERY

A Buddhist Path to Recovering from Addiction

REFUGE RECOVERY MENTORSHIP

In his teachings, the Buddha repeatedly emphasized the importance of community (sangha) and associating with wise friends. In Refuge Recovery, connection and accountability are the cornerstones upon which we build a recovery practice. It is essential for us to connect with others in recovery who will guide us, inspire us, support us, and challenge us when we get stuck. As we practice vulnerability and honesty with others in recovery, we begin the process of taking refuge in the sangha.

HOW DO I BEGIN PRACTICING THE REFUGE RECOVERY PROGRAM?

It is suggested to begin practicing the Refuge Recovery program using the guidelines established on page seventy-four of the Refuge Recovery book. The process describes an initial sixty day period of attending as many meetings and making as many personal connections in Refuge Recovery as possible, allowing the sangha to help us in establishing abstinence and in developing a daily Refuge Recovery meditation practice.

Having established renunciation and a daily meditation practice, regularly attending meetings and making connections in the Refuge Recovery sangha for sixty days we should begin the inventory process with a mentor or trusted peer. If you are motivated to begin your inventories before sixty days and you feel you have the support to do so, go ahead.

The feelings and reactions we will have when we begin to do the work of the Refuge Recovery inventories may be strong or uncomfortable. Some distance from the last time we acted on our addiction is recommended. The ability to sit with feelings and reactivity in meditation is one of our greatest weapons in not giving in to our craving. The support of the sangha is invaluable as we commit to these first steps on the path to freedom.

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WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

Mentorship is a supportive, one-on-one relationship with another member actively engaged in the Refuge Recovery program. Most simply, mentors are other members of the Refuge Recovery community, freely sharing their own experience, guiding us through the inventories and showing us how to live the Refuge Recovery program.

Refuge Recovery mentors help us to understand reality and show us how to respond with compassion. They urge us to continue on the path of recovery when it gets difficult and we want to give up. Our mentors are the sounding boards we use as we work towards new insights and healing. Our mentors are people we can get, and stay honest with, creating the personal accountability and integrity at the heart of recovery.

WHO CAN BE MY MENTOR?

In the Refuge Recovery book, our stated ideal is that those who have maintained renunciation for over a year, established a regular Refuge Recovery meditation practice, and completed the inventories with a RR mentor are ready to become mentors for newer members. Some new communities do not have members with such experience. In this case, new members may choose to turn to the more experienced members in their communities, even if they do not have year of recovery yet, to act as mentors.

The necessary criteria for anyone offering mentorship in Refuge Recovery are that the potential mentor has:

- Established abstinence from drugs and alcohol.
- Established, and is adhering to, process addiction bottom lines.
- Established a regular Refuge Recovery meditation practice.
- Has a mentor themselves and continues the RR inventory process with a mentor.

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If there are very few, or no members in your community with sufficient experience, you may be able to find a mentor by connecting with others in online meetings, or with Refuge Recovery communities in other cities.

HOW DO I GET A MENTOR?

Listening to the wisdom of those who are using the Refuge Recovery practice to attain freedom from addiction is important. The classic recovery instruction is to try to find someone who has what we want. Abstinence, a sense of ease, good relationships with others, knowledge of our program and practices, and a spirit of service are indicators of a strong candidate for mentorship.

Refuge Recovery groups discuss mentorship at the end of each meeting, detailing the process for supporting newer members in finding a mentor. Some groups may encourage newer members to speak to the group secretary after the meeting. Some may provide a phone list of willing mentors. It is important for each RR group to make connecting with mentors a part of each meeting.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?

New members seeking a mentor should be willing to attend meetings regularly and demonstrate to the group that they are sincere in their desire to use the Refuge Recovery program to recover.

Therapists, counselors and psychiatrists are not a substitute for our mentors in recovery. The experience and support of those who have shared the suffering of addiction and have now found the way out of that suffering through the Refuge Recovery program is unparalleled. Complete honesty with at least one person can be the foundation of our recovery. The relationship with our mentor may be the first honest relationship we have had

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with regard to our addiction. Our relationships can be rebuilt and renewed, with our shared suffering serving as the empathetic ground.

When selecting a mentor, it is important to remember that we are each responsible for our own recovery. No one else can do the hard work of developing and maintaining a regular Refuge Recovery practice. Mentors give freely of their time, effort and energy, and it is up to each of us to honor this service by fulfilling our commitments to the process and communicating in a responsible manner.

Mentorship styles are not fixed. For example, some mentors ask for daily calls or texts, some hold weekly check-ins, some assign a task and expect to be contacted when the task is completed. As mentees, we work with our mentors style. Discussing these styles with potential mentors is common.

Everyone is free to choose our own mentors. No one is obligated to work with a mentor suggested to us by the group, or a member who approaches us offering mentorship.

It is suggested that we find a mentor who has experience with the form of addiction we are currently seeking to establish renunciation from. Substance addictions and process addictions have different renunciation criteria.

It is also suggested that we avoid getting into a mentorship relationship that may lead to sexual attraction. Gender need not be the deciding factor. Sexual attraction can distract us from the nature of mentorship and interfere with our ability to communicate honestly.

It is not recommended to have more than one RR mentor. Having more than one mentor at a time may lead us into a situation where we seek only the answers or guidance we desire. Please consider how having more than one mentor affects the ability of your group to offer mentorship.

Mentorship is not a lifelong commitment from either side. Our loyalty is to the program and

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the sangha, not to any one individual. Mentors and mentees may relapse, move or leave Refuge Recovery. Some members will have multiple mentors over their long-term recovery. Our relationship with a mentor may end if we do not fulfill our obligations as a mentee. If as a mentee you find yourself with a mentor who doesn't return your calls or is unable to honor the mentorship commitment you may have to find another mentor. This is never an excuse or reason to relapse. Stay in sangha.

We build ongoing relationships with other members in the program. By connecting with our mentors, and others in the program, we broaden our base of support. As we broaden our base of support, we also broaden our perspective on recovery, and learn new ways to respond to the challenges we face both as individuals and as a community.

BEING A MENTOR

The mentorship relationship is the foundation of Refuge Recovery groups. Building these primary relationships is the most important form of service members can provide both to individuals and to our Refuge Recovery groups.

Offering service to others provides an opportunity to share what has been freely offered to us. For Refuge Recovery members, providing mentorship is a key component of our individual recoveries. Mentorship relationships are a turning toward community, breaking the isolation of our addictive patterns. Mentorship provides a sense of purpose and a direct method of creating positive change in the world.

Humility is a core principle of mentorship. A mentor's role is not that of a parent or social worker, nor does a mentor act as a therapist or physician offering professional advice. Mentors are not meditation teachers or spiritual gurus. Refuge Recovery mentors offer a unique relationship. The experience of those who have shared the suffering of addiction and have now found a way out of that suffering through the Refuge Recovery program is unparalleled. The wisdom attained by working the Refuge Recovery program can help

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change lives. We should be quick to remember that none of us have all the answers, and that as mentors we share only our lived experience with the Refuge Recovery program.

Again, mentorship styles are not fixed. For example, some mentors and mentees use daily calls or texts, some have weekly check-ins, some assign a writing or amends task and expect to be contacted only when the task is completed. These are just a few of the ways mentorship is practiced in RR.

Mentors must balance an effective mentorship style with the commitment to their own recovery program. The recovery guideline of not taking on more mentees than we can offer quality mentorship, is a good one. We are free to choose our own mentees. RR members are not obligated to offer mentorship to anyone. We use discernment when making the decision to enter into a mentorship relationship.

It is suggested that we work with individuals who are seeking recovery from forms of addiction we have experience renouncing. Substance addictions and process addictions have different renunciation criteria.

It is also suggested that we avoid getting into a mentorship relationship that may lead to sexual attraction. Gender need not be the defining factor. Sexual attraction can distract us from the nature of mentorship and interfere with our ability to communicate honestly.

Mentorship need not be considered a lifelong commitment. Our loyalty is to the program and the sangha, not to any one individual. Mentors and mentees may relapse, move or leave Refuge Recovery. Many will begin the process of the inventories, some will lose enthusiasm, and some will take a conscious break from inventory. Often, these mentees will return to inventory work at a later date. In these situations, mentors can continue to work with mentees by encouraging commitment to the daily recovery practice, to meditation, and to recovery service even when inventory work has slowed or stopped temporarily. Mentors can continue to provide solid accountability to mentees in this position. Each situation is

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different. Some will begin the mentorship process and not follow through. Mentors have an obligation to the RR group and must balance the needs of the group with the needs of individual mentees. Our groups need those willing to mentor to ensure the continuation of the group. Mentorship is the lifeblood of each Refuge Recovery sangha. It is ultimately our responsibility as mentors to use our effort and energy to work with those who remain committed to the Refuge Recovery program.

We offer gratitude to all those willing to offer mentorship in Refuge Recovery. We urge all who are ready to take on this task, to do so, in the spirit of service and humility. The often transformed lives of those we mentor, and the creation of strong and meaningful Refuge Recovery groups, are the lasting results of this work.