

# OA GUIDELINES



## OA C.A.R.E.S

(Committed to Action for Recovery, Encouragement and Support)

### Correspondence Program Guidelines

The OA C.A.R.E.S correspondence program was created to establish a network of support for compulsive overeaters who are incarcerated. By describing how OA has affected your life, your personal letter delivers OA's Twelve-Step program of recovery directly to those in need. Thank you for volunteering to share the very essence of our program—one compulsive overeater reaching out to another.

These guidelines have been developed to help facilitate your correspondence by suggesting ways to adhere to OA principles and comply with special requirements established by the participating institutions. Please observe these guidelines in all your correspondence.

Your letter should share your experience, strength and hope about the problems associated with compulsive eating. When discussing your experience, remember to focus on the solutions you found by working the OA program. The hope of our program lies in the recovery we have found through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. The program can work no matter what our life circumstances.

*Please keep your focus on OA.* You may be in other Twelve-Step programs, but you have been selected as a volunteer for the OA C.A.R.E.S. program because you are a compulsive overeater. Keep it simple.

Participants will be assigned to individuals of the same sex. Correspondents may discuss issues seemingly unrelated to compulsive overeating, such as their convictions, legal matters or medical problems. Keep in mind that we cannot solve these problems and *should never give advice* on any of these subjects.

The following are some useful suggestions for OA C.A.R.E.S. volunteers:

#### PLEASE

- Remember that OA members in prison are simply compulsive overeaters looking for the hope of recovery.
- Use your sense of humor. Be lighthearted.
- Be courteous. Respond to letters within two weeks. Write legibly.
- Be mindful of Traditions Six, Eight and Twelve.\*
- Tell your story (“what I was like, what happened, and what I'm like now”).
- Relate your experience. Describe how you work through your problems thanks largely to the growth you have experienced in the OA Twelve-Step program.

#### PLEASE KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND

You are embarking on a Twelfth-Step relationship with a person whom you have not met who may be unwell in several areas, and who may even be using this relationship for motives unrelated to recovery. It is important that you be cautious and alert. We would like to hear from you about your experience so we can help others.

For your protection, all correspondence between the prison inmate and you will be handled by the Member Services Department at the OA World Service Office (WSO). The Member Services Department will not personally identify you to the inmate. You will write to the inmate and mail the letter to Member Services. Member Services will forward your letter to the inmate, and any response from the inmate will be sent to you in care of the WSO. Member Services will then forward the inmate's letter to you.

Certainly you will want to avoid being used for purposes other than Twelve-Step work. To offer to carry messages to anyone, or to contact family members, a third party or the prison administration on the inmate's behalf, might hinder rather than help the inmate's recovery or might breach the institution's regulations. Doing so might compromise you and the good reputation of OA. Do not send food, money, gifts or cigarettes, because this can make the inmate rely on you rather than on a Higher Power.

In other words, we suggest that you stick to the program of recovery. That is, after all, the only thing you can provide—the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous.

\* *Tradition Six:* An OA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

\* *Tradition Eight:* Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

\* *Tradition Twelve:* Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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OA Board-Approved

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