

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 eaters who are incarcerated. By describing how OA has affected your life, you can help deliver 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 adhere to 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.

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. The inmate you are corresponding with 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. Your response should address these issues, if at all, *only* in the context of working our Twelve Step program.

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

Remember

OA members in correctional facilities are compulsive eaters simply 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 you were like, what happened, and what you are 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.

Keep The Following Cautions 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 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 inmate and you will be handled by the Member Services Department at the OA World Service Office. The Member Services Department will not personally identify you to the inmate. You will write to the inmate and mail the letter to the WSO. Letters should be signed only with your initials. Do not reveal your name or any other personal information, such as where you live, your marital status, or the names of family members. Use universal identifiers, such as “my relative,” “my friend,” or other general descriptions. In sharing your experience, strength, and hope, avoid sharing details that might be too identifiable. While you are anonymous to the correctional facility, OA is not. OA received clearance to communicate with the inmate, so it is essential that you not do anything that could reveal your identity or jeopardize OA's clearance.

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. Never communicate with an inmate without going through the WSO.

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. Breaches of institutional regulations may result in discipline, or even criminal penalties. Never send anything, such as food, money,

gifts, or cigarettes, to the inmate. 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.

OA Board-Approved

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