



# **Oxford House**

## **Newcomer Orientation**

## **Outline:**

- 1) Introduction to Oxford House**
- 2) The Principles**
- 3) Oxford House Traditions**
- 4) House Officers**
- 5) House Meetings**

### **1) Introduction to Oxford House:**

The first Oxford House was started in 1975 in Silver Springs MD by a group of recovering alcoholics/addicts who were living in a halfway house that was closing down. Worried that they would have to leave and not have a safe place to go, they decided to rent a house together and hold each other accountable to staying sober. Within six months they had enough money to open a second house, to meet the need for more beds. With the help of Federal and State programs this growth has continued for 39 years and today there are over 1700 houses, in almost every state, and in several countries.

Oxford Houses are rented family houses where groups of recovering individuals live together in an environment supportive to recovery from addiction. Each house is self-run and financially self-supported following a standardized system of democratic operation. Each group obtains a Charter from Oxford House Inc., which is the umbrella organization for the national network of individual Oxford Houses.

An Oxford House Charter has three basic requirements for the group:

- It must be democratically self-run
- It must be financially self-supported
- It must expel any resident who returns to using alcohol or drugs

## **2) The Principles:**

The first Tradition of Oxford House states that Oxford House has as its primary goal the provision of housing and rehabilitative support for the alcoholic and addict that wants to stop using or drinking. Oxford House combines Recovery, Responsibility, and Replication to enable each of our members to live free of the disasters of drug and/or alcohol addiction. How you use it will make a difference in your own recovery and the stability of the house.

Each house is guided by the simple guidelines of our manual and traditions and the individual house set of rules, guidelines or house expectations. You are expected to read these and familiarize yourself with them. If you have any questions a house member will explain them.

### **RECOVERY**

Each member is responsible for his or her own plan of recovery. This should include completing your treatment plan (if applicable), participating in a 12-Step program or related recovery program, and using an outside sponsor or your housemates to help you. Healthy recovery is about change. This means making an effort to change your old behaviors. You may be asked to write out a plan for your recovery when you move into the house. Many of the houses may require that you attend a certain number of meetings weekly. Many years of research has shown that our successful members attend four to five AA or NA meetings weekly. All of our guidelines have been designed to support you in your recovery and to ensure a healthy home.

### **RESPONSIBILITY**

Each house holds weekly business meetings. As a member you will participate in these meetings, have full voting rights and may even be elected by the other members to hold an office. House Officers are elected every six months. Your house will help you learn the procedure of their Oxford House meetings. We encourage you to learn the duties of each House Officer, learn the Oxford House Traditions, and to read the Oxford House Manual. You will be expected to pay your share of expenses on time, to complete your assigned chores, to follow your plan of recovery and to abide by the house rules. You may be asked to fill out some forms. Please do so as soon as possible. As you grow in your recovery and comfort level in the house you can help other new members. Your growth will be enhanced by your willingness to participate.

### **REPLICATION**

As you grow in your Oxford House experience, you may be asked to share your experience at treatment centers and other agencies. You may have the opportunity to assist in the opening of a new house. This has many aspects to it, such as recruiting new members, sending out fliers, finding household donations and teaching the new house how Oxford House functions. We are happy you have been chosen to be a member of our house and share in all of our recoveries. You will be joining a family of more than 10,000 people around the world that currently live by the Oxford House Traditions, Principles, and System of Operations. Oxford House is a time-tested model, with 39 years of helping hundreds of thousands of successful recovering alcoholic and addicts. Oxford House allows you to stay as long as you like, as long as you do not go back to using drugs and alcohol, and abide by the guidelines. Your success depends on your own honesty, open mindedness, and willingness to change, and share your recovery.

### **3) Oxford House Traditions:**

1. Oxford House has as its primary goal the provision of housing and rehabilitative support for the alcoholic and drug addict who wants to stay clean and sober.
2. All Oxford Houses are run on a democratic basis. Our officers are but trusted servants serving continuous periods of no longer than six months in any one office.
3. No Member of an Oxford House is ever asked to leave without cause – a dismissal vote by the membership because of drinking, drug using, or disruptive behavior.
4. Oxford House is not affiliated with AA or NA, organizationally or financially, but Oxford House members realize that only active participation in AA or NA offers assurance of continued sobriety.
5. Each Oxford House should be autonomous except in matters affecting other houses or Oxford House, Inc., as a whole.
6. Each Oxford House should be financially self-supporting although financially secure houses may, with approval or encouragement of Oxford House, Inc., provide new or financially needy houses a loan for a term not to exceed one year.
7. Oxford House should remain forever non-professional, although individual members may be encouraged to utilize outside professionals whenever such utilization is likely to enhance recovery from alcoholism.
8. Propagation of the Oxford House, Inc. concept should always be conceived as public education rather than promotion. Principles should always be placed before personalities.
9. Members who leave an Oxford House in good standing are encouraged to become associate members and offer friendship, support, and example, to newer members.

#### **4) House Officers:**

For an Oxford House to run successfully on a democratic basis, it must have certain elected officers. It is part of the Oxford House tradition to make sure that officers do not become so entrenched that other members of the house do not have an equal voice in its management. Therefore, it is an Oxford House tradition that no officer shall serve longer than six months in the same office for one continuous period of time. All officers are but trusted servants of the entire membership. The number of officers may vary from House to House but all Houses generally have the following elected officers:

- President - Presides over house meetings. Represents the House for the Chapter and the general public.
- Treasurer - Responsible for the House finances.
- Secretary - Keeps a record of house meetings. Responsible for house correspondence.
- Comptroller - Records each member's Equal Expense Shared and any other credits or debits.
- Coordinator - Responsible for the maintenance of the house.
- House Services Committee Representative - Serves on the Chapter House Services Committee.

The duties of the various officers are to keep Oxford House running smoothly, conduct regular meetings of the House membership, assure that the Oxford House Traditions are followed, keep the finances of the House in good order, and help serve the Oxford House community in their area.

## 5) Meetings:

It is important to have a House meeting at least once a week. After some experimenting, an Oxford House will find the particular hour or half-hour that is the most convenient for most of its members. A meeting should be used to:

- Consider new applications for membership
- Report on the current financial status of the House
- Resolve any problem affecting members in the House
- Resolve general complaints about maintenance of the house
- Consider proposals or projects to be undertaken by the House

The Secretary should take notes about what takes place at each House meeting. These notes are called “Minutes”. The Minutes of the previous meeting should be read at the beginning of each meeting, and by a majority vote, be approved or corrected.

The next item of business should be the report on House finances by the Treasurer and Comptroller. The Treasurer’s Financial Status Report lets everyone in the House know the current financial condition of the House. It shows:

- Money on hand the week before
- Money collected this week
- Bills paid this week
- Current money on hand
- Bills due by the end of the current month

Each member is responsible for an equal share of the overall expenses of running the house. This is called Equal Expense Share or EES. The Comptroller will give a report of what each member’s weekly share of household expenses are currently.

The Treasurer and Comptroller are the two officers primarily responsible for assuring sound financial management for an Oxford House. Together with the President, they should continually check and crosscheck the books so as to assure the accuracy of the true financial status of the House.

Next is the Coordinators report on the maintenance of the house and everyone’s assigned responsibilities. This report should also include safety checks on the house, such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

Now the old business is read, the new business from the previous meeting, to see if any items needed action and what action was taken on them. This includes any issues that were “tabled” at the last meeting. For example, if a member was made responsible for calling the landlord about a maintenance issue, then it should be discussed as to whether this was done.

New business includes a wide range of decisions facing an Oxford House; from buying trashcans to plans for opening a new House. The House meeting is the place to resolve any conflicts or issues which may arise from living together as a group. It is also a good place to pass on information about new AA or NA meetings or up-coming AA/NA related events. Staying sober and enjoying life is at the heart of Oxford House living.