

Sober Companion

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A sober companion or sober coach is an addiction treatment professional who provides one-on-one assistance to newly recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. The therapeutic goal is to help the patient maintain sufficient abstinence from alcohol and drugs to establish healthy routines outside of a residential treatment facility. The sober coach is a direct descendant of the Alcoholics Anonymous "sponsor," a significant difference being that the sober coaching is done for payment while a sponsor works for free as the practice of the 12th step, carrying the message of recovery.

A sober companion chaperones a recovering addict to help ensure they do not relapse. They may be hired to provide round the clock care, be on-call, or to accompany the recovering addict during particular activities. A companion acts as an advocate for the newly recovering person and provides new ways for the client to act in their own living environment. Companions use techniques such as meditation, prayer and affirmation of sober choices, common to other recovery methods like Alcoholics Anonymous and counseling. They may also search for hidden drugs and restrain a client to prevent them from relapsing.

Companions are sometimes used as a replacement for residential addiction treatment or other forms of drug rehabilitation but companions such as Caine and rehabilitation center staff such as Dr. Hunsicker recommend a combined approach, particularly for people at high risk of relapse. They suggest that companions can help a patient successfully transition from a heavily structured, secure environment into the world where he or she previously failed to stay sober. Despite this some experts like Dr. Jennifer Schneider are skeptical of the companion approach and its dependence on a single individual.

Companion treatment usually last from one to four weeks, with ten to fourteen days being the norm. Ideally, a companion's presence in the patient's life will decrease as the patient proves his or her ability to confront family, work, and legal issues without relapse. Some providers stay with their client for many months, and some offer only transportation services (for instance, to and from treatment facilities or sober living homes). The sober companion's duties encompass a wide variety, from simply ensuring the client remains abstinent to serving as a resource broker in the client's home community.

In keeping with several other forms of drug rehabilitation, practitioners do not need to have any formal training or qualification. Most companions are recovering addicts who, themselves, have been able to maintain multiple years of sobriety. While some companions will have some training in psychology, sociology, and/or medicine, in addition to a strong personal program of recovery, there are no professional associations or boards to set standards or monitor the state of the field. This lack of oversight and accountability is a concern according to the California Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors.

Sober companions are sometimes used in cases where an actor or a musicians will not attend treatment, but must remain abstinent to complete a film or recording project. They are also

depicted by some media outlets as "adult babysitters" for actors, musicians, and other celebrities.

Brief History of Sober Companions

In 1984, the rock group Aerosmith was attempting a comeback; but it was not working, just as their newest album *Back in the Saddle* was not climbing the charts. There were a lot of things that were not working for Aerosmith, Joe Perry and Steven Tyler, front men for the group, are referred to as the "Toxic Twins" for their heroin habits and other behaviors on and off the stage. (George-Warren & Romanowski, 2001). In fact, the entire band was heavily drinking or taking drugs. That summer, while touring for the new album, co-manager, David Krebs, hired a psychiatrist to tour with the band. After a month, the doctor claimed the band was "unfixable". Krebs left the band. Aerosmith denied drugs were dragging down the tour and the album sales. (Aerosmith and Davis, 1997). The band pointed their fingers outward, blaming everyone else for their problems. The band changed record labels from CBS Records to Arista Records, and hired Tim Collins to manage the band (Aerosmith & Davis 1997).

Tim Collins, told the group that in order to survive they had to get sober, claiming that if they stopped using alcohol and drugs, he could take them "platinum" again (George -Warren & Romanowski , 2001). Band members Joey Kramer and Tom Hamilton both became sober and by the fall of 1986. Steven Tyler went to an in-treatment drug rehabilitation center, followed by Joe Perry. By the end of 1986, the final band member Brad Whitford had accepted sobriety. Even so, Aerosmith's sobriety commitment to Tim Collins was only partially completed. Collins still had to get these heavy metal rockers on the road, with roadies, groupies, opening acts and exposure to more drugs and alcohol, in order to promote their newest album, *Permanent Vacation*. Tim was able to help the group, maintain sobriety throughout the tour by contracting a recovery coach, Betty Wyman to stay with the band through the tour.

A new era of recovery support had begun. Sober Companions (aka Sober Coaches) became an important for of support especially to persons in high risk situations or those under contract to perform.

Approaches of Sober Companions

There appears to be many approaches and philosophies of sober companions, with some who are anti 12 step and others who take their addicted clients to 12 step meetings. Approaches like that of Dr. Sober Companion are strict when it comes to removing all enablers including not taking a client to 12 step meetings, where other addicts congregate, and could overwhelmingly influence the client in a negative direction.

Another approach of some sober companions is based on replacement therapies, or taking a

doctor prescribed medication, which is only replacing one drug with another. Some sober companions like Dr. Sober Companion are against using replacement therapy to help their addicted clients. Addicted clients on replacement therapy will test positive for drug use, and this is not an approach to remove drugs from the addict, excepted by all sober companions, because it shows they were never clean and sober at any stage.

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