

# LIFERING'S FOUNDATIONS

## PRINCIPLES

In keeping with LifeRing's philosophy of choice and diversity, we can define our core principles in many ways while the meaning remains relatively the same. Depending on the context and purpose, one wording may work better than another.

### **SOBRIETY | SOBER (ABSTINENCE IN BYLAWS)**

- The only requirement for membership in LifeRing Secular Recovery meetings is a desire to abstain from the use of alcohol and illicit or non-medically indicated drugs.
- We believe that our lives depend on complete freedom from alcohol and addictive drugs that aren't prescribed by a physician. If you want to stay sober, then you are welcome in LifeRing.
- Our purpose for participating in LifeRing is to achieve and maintain complete abstinence from alcohol and drugs that are not medically indicated.

### **SECULARITY | SECULAR**

- Religious beliefs remain private. You aren't asked to have faith or to believe in any strength other than your own.
- Your religious and spiritual beliefs, if any, remain a private matter within LifeRing, and are not a topic for discussion.
- In LifeRing meetings we do not use prayer or talk about God or religion. While spiritual beliefs might be part of an individual's recovery.

### **SELF-HELP**

- We share ideas and insights through sober conversation, and each individual builds a personal recovery plan.
- In sober conversations we share ideas to help ourselves.
- LifeRing participants build a personal recovery program – no suggested steps, no one plan – that is tailored to their individual need.

## SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES

### **SERVICE**

- LifeRing exists only through those individuals who reach out to others by serving as meeting convenors or volunteers.
- While we support one another in meetings and as individuals, our organization depends on the work of many people in order to provide the services, resources and communication our members depend upon.

### **SUPPORT**

- LifeRing is a community of people who support one another as each maintains a sober life.
- Everyone in LifeRing gives something back, from simply helping another person, to donating money or time. Everyone's contribution is valued.

# LIFERING BELIEVES IN

The following list defines many of the ideals to which LifeRing aspires as an organization. Our strength as an organization is based on a few shared values which define our purpose and how we relate to one another. These are beliefs in the sense of conviction: we are, as a group, convinced that certain agreements are essential in order for us to provide real choices for sober living, to present a variety of resources, and to reflect the diversity of our membership.

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**SOBER LIVING** | LifeRing's believes in the value of sober living.

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**CHOICE** | LifeRing is just one among many programs for sobriety, and individuals ought to have the right to choose which programs and organizations, or combinations of programs or organizations, work best for them.

**OPTIONS** | People are encouraged to share specific tools, methods, and ideas that have helped them to live a sober life. Others may choose to adopt these, or not. In this way, LifeRing provides many options, so that each person may find the ways of sober living that are most useful in the context of their own personal values, needs and circumstances.

**DIVERSITY** | We recognize and celebrate both the similarities and the differences in our participants, members, volunteers, staff, and communities. LifeRing seeks to encourage and echo that diversity in our services, resources, meetings and ideas. We value diversity because it promotes learning, creates understanding, enriches our relationships, and enhances our ability to solve problems, make decisions, and maintain sobriety.

**INCLUSION** | Whenever possible, LifeRing chooses program designs and communication methods which encompass the widest possible variety of people, perspectives, tools and ideas, while still focusing on sober, secular, self-help. We welcome people regardless of their beliefs. Family and friends are welcome in our meetings. We are inclusive, and the organization welcomes and embraces each individual who joins us.

**ACCESS** | LifeRing strives to provide ready and equal access so that everyone can give and receive support, regardless of a person's economic status, geographic location, culture, language, race, gender, sexual orientation, length of sobriety, or kind or level of problem with drugs or alcohol. LifeRing is there when you need us, around-the clock, seven days a week. We are ready when you are.

**MANY WAYS TO BELIEVE** | We recognize that attempting to reach an organizational consensus of belief about what are the "true" causes of addiction, the "preferred" steps to recovery, or the "best" ways of living sober, would reduce the value of our programs and constrain our ability to make a meaningful contribution to the sober life of each and every LifeRing participant.

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**INDIVIDUALITY** | LifeRing is person-centered: our people are our source and our strength. We recognize that everyone is unique, and that people's needs for sobriety support and ability to offer help may differ widely. There are as many ways to live free of drugs and alcohol as there are stories of successful sober people.

**SELF-DEFINITION** | In LifeRing each person makes a personal choice about how best to describe himself or herself. We don't label one another, or require anyone to label themselves. You need not describe yourself as an 'alcoholic' or 'addict' in LifeRing. It's enough that you want to enjoy life clean and sober.

**SELF-RELIANCE** | As individuals, we believe that we are responsible for our own behavior and our own recovery. That doesn't mean we shouldn't ask for help! Mutual support is the reason for our organizing meetings and resources.

**INTELLECT** | LifeRing relies on the intellect of members to evaluate themselves honestly. We approach sobriety with reason, tempered by emotion, enlightened by hope.

**STRENGTH** | We are each powerful instruments of change within our own lives, and we believe that our strength can bring about remarkable changes in ourselves, in others, and in the world around us.

**EMPOWERMENT** | LifeRing believes that individual strengths and mutual support empower individuals to achieve sobriety.

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**CONVERSATION** | Conversation among people striving to live sober lives is the primary method by which sobriety is strengthened for each individual. Cross-talk in LifeRing meetings is one important feature of this belief. LifeRing encourages effective communication: speaking with clarity, listening compassionately, asking for clarification, acknowledging conflicts, and providing feedback that is respectful of the opinions, values, and beliefs of others. At all levels, we are serious about our responsibility to converse soberly, openly, honestly and joyfully.

**STORIES** | Every person who seeks to live a sober life has his or her own story. People will differ according to length of sobriety, length and nature of their issues with drugs and alcohol, level and type of dependence or addiction, depth of consequences that were suffered, environmental circumstances, level and kind of available sobriety support, as well as differing in their values, circumstances, and abilities. LifeRing strives to meet these individual needs by encouraging people to tell their stories of achieving sobriety, by valuing their experiences, and by documenting and disseminating their insights.

**PLANNING** | LifeRing stresses the development of personal recovery plans as a basis for sobriety. For individuals, these plans may be implicit or explicit, and need not adhere to any shared beliefs beyond LifeRing's core values of sober, secular self-help. LifeRing's focus on planning is echoed by the organization: evidence-based, comprehensive and explicit, because such planning encourages transparency and participatory governance, allows for the most efficient use of resources, and serves as an example to individuals.

**KNOWLEDGE** | We recognize that the more we know about addiction, recovery, and living sober, the more likely that we will be able to stay clean and sober. Knowledge can take many forms, science, psychology, philosophy, self-knowledge, and sharing the experiences and resources of others. LifeRing appreciates each of these as sources of inspiration for sobriety.

**PARTICIPATION** | We meet in a circle, face to face, as equals. No one among us has greater authority in matters of mutual support. We make it easy to belong from the very first day, as simple as answering "How was your week?". But no one is required to respond, and anyone may simply listen if that is their preference.

**AFFIRMATION** | We don't encourage guilt or shame; nor do we attack or confront. We share insights and ideas from personal experience, rather than giving advice. We affirm the value of each person, just as they are. We affirm the aspirations of each individual, without imposing expectations.

**PATIENCE** | LifeRing believes that time can heal. Our perspectives become clearer when we devote attention to a situation over time.

**HOPE** | We are a positive group, focused on the present-day and our hope for a meaningful and happy sober future.

**RESPECT** | LifeRing seeks to treat each person with equal respect and to communicate how much we value her or him as an individual. We ask our participants to go beyond tolerance and endeavor to understand other people's points of view.

**COMPASSION** | We recognize that although our situations are different, we can learn from our shared experiences in overcoming addiction. LifeRing cares about each individual, and each of us tries to empathize with others. We are compassionate in the broadest sense of the word, sharing a passion for sober living that allows us to bridge our differences.

**LAUGHTER** | We hope not to take ourselves too seriously! Laughter is central to living sober, and part of the best LifeRing meetings and exchanges.

**JOY** | We hope that each person who contacts LifeRing will find comfort, compassion, contentment and, yes – joy – in the experience, and in a life of sobriety.

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**BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER** | LifeRing offers the opportunity to engage socially after isolation, to share experiences, and to build relationships of trust among equals. Convening means “bringing people together”, and LifeRing meetings offer an opportunity to meet others with whom we can establish friendships and social groups.

**FRIENDSHIP** | LifeRing strives to offer opportunities to engage socially outside of meetings, to share experiences, and to build relationships of trust. For those of us who lived in isolation, friendship offers support and new perspectives on the world. Those of us whose social circles were established in addiction can establish new social circles that support sobriety.

**TRUST** | LifeRing is non-judgmental. Many of us come to LifeRing in situations of desperation, hoping for friendship, acceptance, and to rely upon the good will and discretion of others.

**CONFIDENTIALITY** | In LifeRing, you choose the level of confidentiality you want to maintain. You are never compelled to disclose any personal information to other participants or to the organization. No one is ever required to tell his or her story. LifeRing encourages participants to keep personally identifiable data entirely private. We share ideas and insights, not information about individuals.

**PRIVACY** | LifeRing maintains a privacy policy which details what participants can expect from the organization in terms of safeguarding personal information and identity. We also recognize that convening and other volunteer support for LifeRing programs may require that the organization know who is acting on LifeRing's behalf and must therefore maintain records for contact. Anonymity is not particularly valued by some participants, and LifeRing allows for individuals to provide their own names, email addresses and telephone numbers as they communicate about the organization, should they so desire.

**EQUALITY** | Relationships in LifeRing are among equals. In matters of sobriety support, no individual is granted greater credibility or influence by the organization.

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**COMMUNITY** | LifeRing strives to provide programs which enable the individual to excel at sober living within the context of their families, work, recreation and community, rather than by creating an “alternate universe” of sobriety.

**COLLABORATION** | LifeRing works within communities to establish strong reciprocal relationships, partnerships and joint efforts. LifeRing may share resources with other recovery programs, addiction treatment providers, institutions, organizations, and with government, even when core beliefs are not perfectly aligned.

**OUTREACH** | Many people are searching for support in sobriety, and reaching out to those who are in need, through targeted programs and individual conversations, is a vital part of LifeRing's organization. People most often learn about LifeRing by word of mouth or referral. We speak freely about LifeRing's general programs within our communities whenever we feel comfortable in doing so.

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**ORGANIZATION** | LifeRing strives to provide a priority directed, comprehensive, integrated system of programs as we make the best possible use of our knowledge, human, and material resources. We recognize that people who need help often find it difficult to navigate cumbersome and inadequate recovery support systems, and that LifeRing has a responsibility to simplify, clarify and organize the complex tasks associated with building a personal recovery plan and a meaningful sober life.

**RESPONSIBILITY** | As an organization, we realize that there are few secular recovery alternatives and the demand is great. We are accountable for honest stewardship of the resources entrusted to us, and we are responsible for using those resources wisely in the quality and scope of our programs, so that LifeRing is available to everyone who needs it.

**EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS** | In planning for sober living, LifeRing encourages participants to formulate good questions about their own sobriety, to identify and discuss research, and other evidence-based resources for recovery, to critically appraise such information, to apply various approaches according to individual needs, and to value sobriety tools and methods according to individually experienced efficacy.

**EMPIRICAL EVALUATION** | LifeRing also seeks to evaluate organizational performance using empirical methods, and to provide referrers, funders, and potential members and partners with objective information about our programs.

**TRANSPARENCY** | In order to generate a culture of trust in which individuals can work together successfully, LifeRing's organizational information is freely shared using open decision-making in a collaborative environment. Meetings of LifeRing's governing boards and committees are open to every member and participant, except when to do so would violate requirements for privacy or confidentiality.

**PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE** | Every LifeRing participant is encouraged to participate at every level of decision-making in our volunteer organization. Meetings of the Board of Directors, committees and working groups are conducted online, via telephone, and in person to provide broad opportunities for collaboration. LifeRing's annual Congress establishes a means for individual voices to be heard. Active involvement in governance activities promotes creative problem solving, understanding of organizational decision-making, and trust and respect in organizational culture .

**SECURITY** | LifeRing strives to offer safe, secure, and stable programs and services.

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**FOCUS** | LifeRing provides broad programs to support individualized sobriety. As an organization, we do not stray far from our core shared values of sober, secular, self-help. Our meetings and other communications channels are designed to include everyone who wants to stay sober in a secular setting – focusing on that which we share in common – rather than providing separate programs which may divide us.

**LIFE-LONG LEARNING** | Although our commitment is to prioritizing sobriety first, LifeRing also values resources which promote and enhance life-long learning and celebrate human potential as a part of sober living. Resources that may seem to be only indirectly related to sobriety may still strengthen our mutual support and be critically important to people who are considering sobriety or are newly sober. Indirect resources may also keep members interested, involved, and “giving back” as their sobriety lengthens. Thus, members may share experiences that are indirectly related to sobriety, while always acknowledging that LifeRing neither requires or suggests any program of change other than simply staying sober.

**RECOVERY** | We believe that recovery can be achieved: restoring what we have lost, returning to health, renewing our lives. For many people, recovery may require a focus on personal change, support or self-help for years. While LifeRing urges people to carefully establish and implement a personal recovery plan and be mindful of the risks in early sobriety, some people may need LifeRing for only a short time, recovering quickly to such an extent that they can maintain a sober life without much continuing effort or support. How we choose to use the term “recovery” is up to the individual.

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**UNDERSTANDING BEYOND CONSENSUS** | We see the problem of achieving agreement at the “lowest common denominator.” We share ideas freely without insisting that others believe or behave the same. We acknowledge that methods may work for one person but not for another, that insights or beliefs may differ and still be meaningful, and that respectful conflict can strengthen us. Differences of opinion are in fact the essence of our diversity, recognition that each of us is an individual and may require differing options for recovery. Outside our core values of abstinence, secularity and self-help, we can agree to disagree.

## WE AGREE TO DISAGREE ABOUT

**BASING LIFERING IN SCIENCE** | Our objective understanding of how people are affected by drugs and alcohol is undergoing rapid change. Many of us believe that science allows each of us to better understand the causes of addiction, choose from among many alternative methods by making better predictions, and use objective measures to evaluate our perceptions with greater certainty. Science may help us to consider our individual perspective within the big picture and in the long term. | **HOWEVER** | Others among us are wary of science as a basis for recovery, concerned that science is driven by agendas which we may not share, and are uncomfortable with LifeRing portraying itself as a science-based approach. | **THEREFORE** | In keeping with the nature of science as tests of hypotheses, LifeRing presents scientific findings as knowledge that may be valuable to individuals seeking sobriety, rather than as irrefutable fact.

**SPIRITUALITY** | Many among us turn to religion or faith as a support for our sobriety, and LifeRing respects those beliefs as valuable to those individuals. Some feel that spirituality is a significant element in their recovery. | **HOWEVER** | Others among us do not have faith in the supernatural, and do not believe that religion can contribute to our personal sobriety. | **THEREFORE** | Out of respect for all faiths, and none, we do not use prayer, or talk about god or religion in our meetings or other mutual communications.

**THE NEED FOR FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS** | Many LifeRing members have become sober online, and have never attended a face-to-face meeting. They’ll often point out that online support may be sufficient to maintain sobriety, and that virtual interactions have value unlike those in the physical world. | **HOWEVER** | Others among us feel that face-to-face meetings are a requirement for our

personal sober lives, and that online interactions are not sufficient for everyone. Some attend face-to-face meetings of other groups, in order to meet that need in the absence of LifeRing meetings, or because a combination of programs works best for maintaining personal sobriety. | THEREFORE | LifeRing relies on the individual to decide on the mix of online and face-to-face support that works best for him or her.

**ADDICTION AS A DISEASE** | We live in a society where addiction is broadly recognized as a disease, and many LifeRing members subscribe to this point of view. Some of us are in medically supervised treatment programs, or consider ourselves to be in recovery. | HOWEVER | Others in LifeRing choose not to characterize addiction as a disease, or in medical terms, and maintain differing beliefs regarding the origin and effects of addiction. | THEREFORE | LifeRing avoids characterizing addiction as a disease, and focuses instead on the many ways of living free of addictive substances, regardless of the cause.