Session 39: Serving Without Saving: Help That Does Not Take Over

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Whiteboard; workbooks and pens

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish helping from rescuing, using the session's definitions
- Identify their personal rescue pattern and the feeling it avoids
- Practice offering help as a question instead of a takeover

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 5 — Giving Back. The one idea today is that carrying a corner of a load helps; taking the wheel harms. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Nobody in this room is anybody else's savior — that post is filled. Today we learn the difference between carrying a corner of someone's load and climbing into their life to take the wheel, and why the second one harms you both.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "Tell about a time someone 'helped' you in a way that actually made you smaller. What did they do?" Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Rescue feels like love and works like control. The rescuer gets the relief of being needed; the rescued person gets the message that they cannot be trusted with their own life. In recovery communities the pattern is common and costly: two recoveries end up chained together, and when one slips, both go down. Real help is offered, bounded, and leaves the other person's dignity and decisions intact.

- **Help is offered; rescue is imposed** Help asks: 'Do you want a hand with that?' Rescue announces: 'Move over, I'll handle it.' The question is most of the difference.
- **The need to be needed is a warning sign** If their progress feels like your oxygen, you are no longer serving them — you are using them. Name it to your coach, sponsor, or mentor the day you notice it.
- **Their consequences are their teachers** Shielding a peer from every consequence of their choices steals the lessons that built your own recovery. Support the person; do not intercept the tuition.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Trauma-informed practice warns against helping relationships that repeat control and helplessness, group literature treats clear boundaries as a condition of a safe group, and motivational interviewing names the urge to fix as the 'righting reflex' — it provokes resistance rather than change (SAMHSA, 2014a; Yalom & Leszcz, 2020; Miller & Rollnick, 2023). Key sources for this session: Miller & Rollnick

(2023); SAMHSA (2014a), TIP 57; Yalom & Leszcz (2020). Evidence strength: Moderate. Spiritual practice: Service and helping others — correlates with bounded helping and the helper-therapy principle; evidence: Moderate (Riessman, 1965; Miller & Rollnick, 2023). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Where does your rescue pattern show up — money, rides, excuses, covering for someone, fixing their feelings?
2. What feeling are you avoiding when you rescue — guilt, fear, or being unneeded?
3. What is one sentence you can say this week that offers help and leaves the choice with them?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Rewrite the rescue (in trios): each person states a real rescue sentence they have said — or wanted to say — this month. The trio rewrites it as an offer: a question, a bounded offer, a choice left open. Practice saying the offer out loud twice. Example: 'You're going to blow this — give me your keys and your phone' becomes 'Tonight looks heavy. Do you want me to sit with you, call your sponsor with you, or give you some space?'

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Catch one rescue impulse this week before you act on it. Turn it into an offer, or step back. Write what happened in two or three lines. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

This session is not permission to withhold real help in a crisis — the crisis protocol governs, always. The line is takeover, not compassion. If a participant describes an enmeshed helping relationship already underway, refer it to the Program Director rather than processing it in the room.

Closing (2 minutes)

You can love people all the way to the edge of their choices — and no further; the rest is theirs. Offer clean, step back clean. Next session: the first place service gets tested — home.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐