

Safety and Respect – Practicing the Principles Begins in our Home Group

The information gathered here is referenced from:

- The 62nd General Service Workshop “Safety in AA: Our Common Welfare” April 2012
- Final Report from the Northeast Regional Forum – June 7-9, 2013 Cromwell, Connecticut “Safety in AA: Our Common Welfare”
- Bismarck Monday Night Group Topic for the evening “ Safety and Respect within the Home Group”

When we think about safety and Respect within the Home Group, what questions do we need to answer to help insure that safety?

- How can we make our home group a welcoming and safe place to meet?
- What role can sponsorship play to help with the safety of our AA meetings?
- In keeping with the traditions, how could the group address matters such as: disruptive conduct before, during and after the meeting, inappropriate behavior towards individuals, illegal activity, emergencies, etc.

Let’s take the first question. How can we make our home group a welcoming and safe place to meet?

- How about Greeters? Greeters are very important. They can show up the same time as the Chairperson so no one is alone in the beginning. There are usually 2 Greeters that stand by the door. They would welcome everyone that comes to the door. As newcomers, out of town visitors or someone that has just moved to the area, they can introduce themselves to make sure they feel welcome. They then introduce them to a regular member/old-timer that is already there so they are not left alone to fend for him/herself. They will be able to tell if anyone has been drinking and get them to someone to help deal with it. They will see if someone has a bad attitude, that they might become disruptive, again introducing them to someone that can help maintain order. They can keep an eye on what is going on. Maybe seeing if someone looks uncomfortable talking with someone and go over to be there as a way out for that person.
- How about the regular member/old timer? Be available for the greeters to have someone to introduce newcomers/visitors to. They can let newcomers, visitors know where the main meeting room is, the bathroom and show them where the coffee is. Make sure they know they can decline to share, it will help them feel a lot safer and more comfortable so they can spend their time listening instead of thinking about what to share. They can help the disabled with the stair chair or elevator, etc. Be available to give rides to meetings. Offer information about the program and the meetings within the area. Explain about sponsorship. Point out areas and people of concern. Show up early and stay late. Make yourself available to help. Don’t let the chair leave by themselves. Think before you talk. Watch your tone of voice. Don’t embarrass someone by stopping them while they are sharing. Pull them aside and explain the wishes of the group to follow the topic. To get respect be respectful. Never say

anything bad about someone while sharing. Look after the group not yourself. To be a gentleman/lady you need to act like a gentleman/lady. Avoid chatting during introductions and readings.

- How about the group as a whole? Have a mixed group of men and women that offer fellowship during breaks, before and after the meeting. Be sure to have men with men and women with women but don't shy away from mixed groups. Stay approachable. Refrain from forming small groups or cliques. Don't give an impression of an "in" or "out" crowd. Make the newcomer feel wanted and important. Maybe introduce them to the chairperson. We all have a common peril try to stick to our singleness of purpose. Ask at the opening of the meeting if anyone is new to AA, make it a step one meeting. Conduct newcomer/beginners meetings. Encourage newcomers to attend business meetings. As part of the meeting format, announce some guidelines for conduct during the meeting (i.e. texting, crosstalk, cell phones, etc.) Ask at the beginning of the meeting a show hands of people that are willing to be a sponsor. That way the newcomer can watch and listen to them closer. Make AA meetings spirited and enthusiastic so they can feel the love and friendship of AA. Newcomers and Members alike may not remember the speaker or what was shared, but kindness and a feeling of belonging will always be remembered. Show up early and stay late to help get the meeting ready and to cleanup afterwards. Keep a clean meeting place, the effort will make it enticing to keep coming back. Have "leave" greeters at end of meeting to remind members to keep coming back. At business meetings discuss safety, behavior, etc. on a regular bases. Nametags for Greeters are helpful. Provide contact lists with first name, last initial and phone numbers. Separate the men and women lists. Make sure meeting lists are available and that the newcomer gets one.

How can sponsorship help in keeping AA meetings safe?

- The sponsor's responsibility is to provide information and guidance. A sponsor can discuss customs and norms with sponsees. Sponsors can also help recognize or be aware of potential problems before they get out of hand. Sponsors alert sponsees as to risks and safety hazards. They can also advise a sponsee when their behavior is unacceptable. When dealing with a misbehaving member, consult with their sponsor or other established long-time members who may not be aware of the sponsee's conduct. Look for warning signs when sponsees are in trouble. Let the men handle the misbehaving men (same for the women). Be honest with sponsees and warn them about "thirteenth-steppers." Encourage sponsees to read AA literature such as "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship." Sponsors need to be aware of potential issues with male/female relationships. Help the new women live defensively - especially the vulnerable ones. Suggest no new relationships before finishing the Steps. Some members suggest no new relationships before getting through the Ninth Step. There are widely differing opinions on the "one year rule." Be aware that stalking may exist (men stalking women and vice versa). Make the newcomer aware of which members may pose a safety threat, to help the newcomer set good boundaries (what is public vs. what is private/interpersonal communication). Describe what AA is and what it is not. When we keep our Primary Purpose in the forefront many of our imperfections are kept in check (e.g., attend meetings to address alcoholism, not to find sexual partners). Refrain from profanity and, sexual innuendos. Who you date is your business -as long as it is done with integrity and you don't use A.A manipulatively. Some people come into A.A not having any

idea what behaviors are appropriate, and which are not. We can try to inoculate our meetings with a sense of safety and confidentiality.

In keeping with Traditions, how would/does my group address matters that may arise?

- Conduct that disrupts the meeting.
 - Safety is the responsibility of the group. It is helpful if groups have a plan for disruptive persons. Disruptive behavior is often pre-empted by having the chairperson read the meeting guidelines for behavior in the meeting: Have instructions prepared for meeting chairs with suggestions on dealing with disruptive behavior. The group conscience should fully empower meeting chairs and make them aware of their responsibilities to maintain order and safety in meetings so that the group as a whole will benefit. Group conscience discussions should include emphasis on Tradition One and the importance of the unity of the group having precedent over the individual. Group can set boundaries. Do what is necessary to keep meetings safe. Ban persons who repeatedly engage in disruptive conduct that prevents the meeting from fulfilling its primary purpose. Do what is best for the whole group. Address disruptions when they occur. Rely on the meeting chair as the first line of defense for bad behavior. Have key people to step in when it gets out of hand. Disruption by wet drunks is usually handled by escorting the person out of the room by two or more members followed by an explanation; avoid confronting the person in the meeting room; address the problem outside of the concern of disruptive behavior. The person should be allowed to return provided they stop being disruptive. Remind the disruptive person they are not being kicked out of AA or that their membership is being revoked. They are only being ask to leave the meeting until they can act in a non-disrupting behavior. In support of Tradition one and five (unity and primary purpose of a group) they are not welcomed when exhibiting disruptive or threatening behavior. Old timers can offer to have a meeting with them in another room or down at the coffee shop. We always have the option to call the police if disruptive behavior continues. Utilize available security personnel in institutions. The meeting rooms need to be safe and sometimes the police will need to be involved. Call the police if someone's behavior becomes unacceptable or threatening. It is okay to call the police for help. In an emergency, call 911. Have a plan to safeguard our meetings. Be aware that people in AA are in different stages of growth. Safety in meeting rooms should be taken seriously.

- Illegal Activity
 - Illegal and threatening behavior should involve the police. Many groups establish guidelines regarding when it is appropriate to call authorities. Handle the situation within the legal system. The nature of illegal acts can range from violence, embezzlement, theft of property to drug sales at a meeting. Some groups do not hesitate to report illegal activity to the proper authorities. Just because we are AA does not mean we have to tolerate illegal behavior. When we are in a meeting, we are still

citizens and no one is above the law. Some situations may require a phone call to local authorities and/or a restraining order. Today there are constraints (liability issues) that need to be handled properly. Cooperate with the landlord regarding safeguarding their property.

- Inappropriate behavior towards vulnerable new members (e.g., 13 th Stepping)
 - Encourage newcomers that we need to change behaviors in sobriety (appropriate dress and language, etc.) Inappropriate behavior such as acting out or targeting vulnerable new members (e.g., "thirteenth stepping") occurs between someone new to a group and someone who has been around for a while. In general, older members keep an eye out for new and younger members. We need to be aware of two cautions: 1) predators are not always easy to spot and their targets are not always selected by appearance but by vulnerability; and 2) newcomers are vulnerable. Also be aware of monetary predation and so called personal behaviors and watch for drug dealers.
- Emergencies
 - Emergencies need to be handled by those trained for such situations. Make sure fire exits clearly understood. Check on emergency procedures for the facility where the group meets. Have a plan in place on what to do in the event of an emergency. If it is a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or other emergency resources. Never hesitate to call emergency numbers to save a life. Once the call has been made to report an emergency, responders will be arriving - give them room to do their job. Expect ~hat some members who are not directly involved may wish to leave and that addressing the emergency situation is more important than continuing with the meeting. Consider safety measures when evaluating meeting places. Discuss this at business meetings. Some revisions to existing literature to address emergencies/safety may be appropriate.