

What happens at an AA meeting?

No two AA meetings are the same but most follow a similar pattern. A typical meeting in the UK will have between 10 and 40 people attending and last for about 90 minutes. There are closed meetings for members only and open meetings, which anyone can attend.

A chairperson or secretary who asks for a moment's silence usually opens the meeting. Then the AA preamble is read out. A reading often follows from the book "Alcoholics Anonymous".

The chairperson will then introduce a speaker for the evening, someone who is a member of the group or a visitor from another group. The speaker will share his or her own experiences, as both an active and a recovering alcoholic, or talk about a specific topic related to recovery, or maybe one of AA's 12 Steps.

After the speaker has finished sharing, which might last for anything between 15 and 30 minutes, the chairperson responds, picking out similarities in his or her own story and then opens the meeting for anybody to share. People may relate to the speaker or share a specific problem they need to get off their chest. No one diagnoses anyone else as an alcoholic in AA. Self-diagnosis is left to the individual after he or she has heard others sharing their experiences. Before the meeting closes the collection pot is passed - contributions are optional, and are limited to AA members only.

Meetings take place in church halls, schools, hospitals, village halls, prisons, treatment centres and any other place where rooms are available for rent on a regular basis. At the present time there are more than 3,500 AA meetings taking place each week in the UK.



Is AA 100% successful?

No, not in our experience. To get some data on what percentage of us do maintain sobriety a recent survey of AA membership revealed the following information:

40% of the members who responded had not had a drink for between two and ten years and

73% had not had a drink for at least a year.

In AA the belief, based on experience, is that it is never safe for an alcoholic to drink again. However, rather than make a life pledge, it is suggested that a newcomer stops drinking "one day at a time". This makes the prospect of stopping, and staying stopped, easier.

Many recovering alcoholics who tried all sorts of ways to stop drinking eventually found a contented solution in AA.

Is AA a professional organisation?

Since all AA members have "been there", their collective wealth of knowledge about alcoholism is unique.

Some people come to AA with more problems than alcoholism. AA does not claim to have the skills or knowledge to deal with these problems but would always advise the individual concerned to seek professional help from an appropriate source, and to continue going to AA for his or her alcoholism.

How to find out more about AA

Going to AA open meetings is the best possible way to get a feel for the form and dynamics of AA. There are many of these types of meetings where the non-alcoholic is welcome to attend and observe. If you have any questions someone will be pleased to answer them after the meeting.

Nationally, the General Service Office in York, the Northern Service Office in Glasgow or the Southern Service Office in London will be able to provide details of open meetings or put you in touch with the relevant local Liaison Officer who can give you more details on other facilities available in the area, e.g. visiting speakers or availability of AA literature.

Our web site, www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk, is another way of establishing answers to any questions you may have.



AA General Service Office

PO Box 1, Toft Green,
York YO1 7NJ

National Office: 01904 644026

AA Southern Service Office

Raven Wharf, 14 Lafone Street
London SE1 2LR

London Office: 020 7407 0700

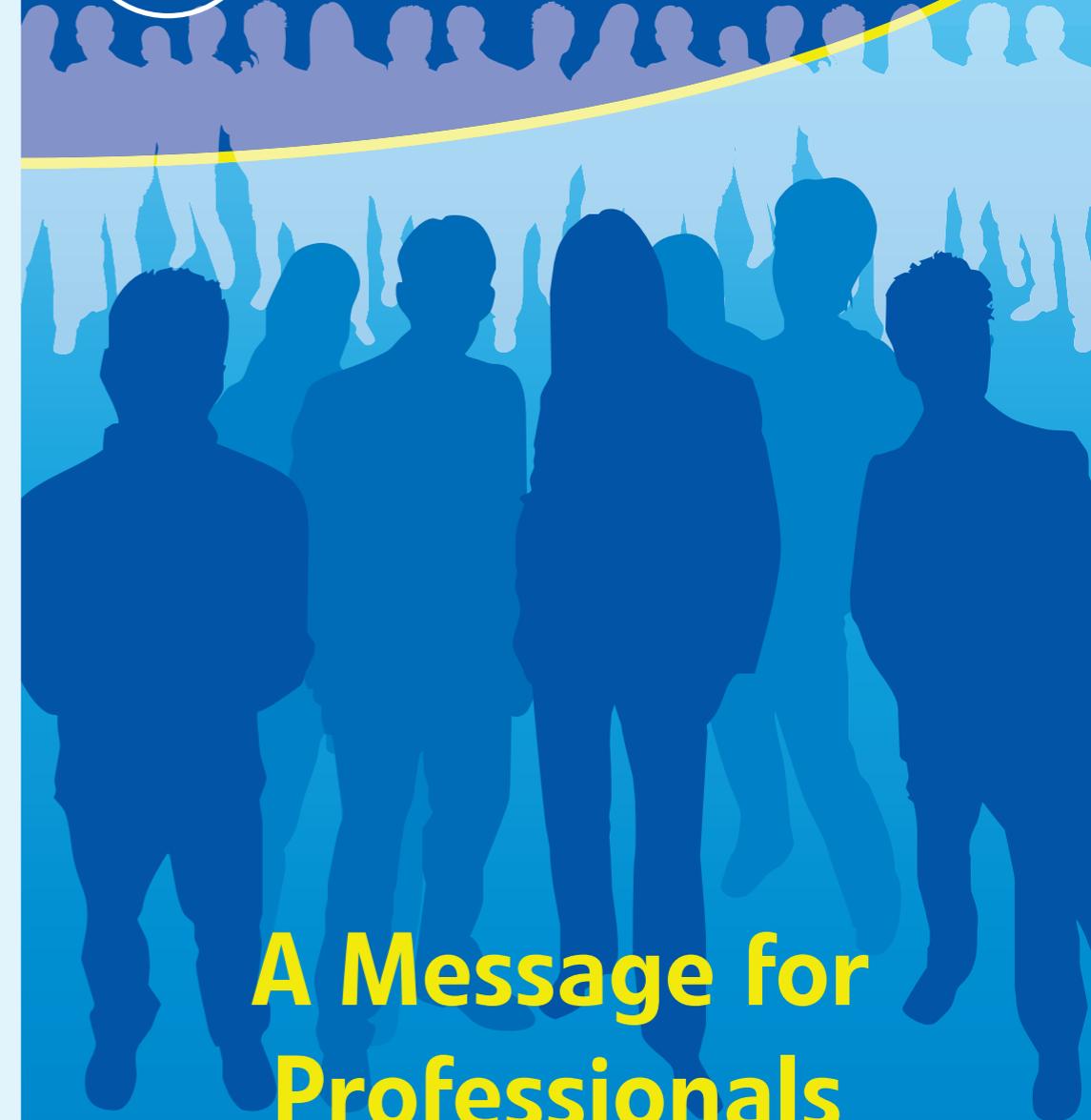
AA Northern Service Office

Baltic Chambers, 4th Floor, 50
Wellington Street, Glasgow G2 6HJ

Glasgow Office: 0141 226 2214



Alcoholics Anonymous



A Message for Professionals

Is AA a religious organisation?

AA is not allied with any religious group, formal or otherwise, nor does it tell its members what to believe, what is right or wrong or claim to know any religious "truth".

The 12 Steps of recovery suggest belief in a "Higher Power", something more than the individual. The form that this Higher Power takes is entirely up to the individual concerned.

"God as we understand Him" replaces the power alcohol had on their lives. Some members have religious beliefs and many never had any form of religious belief. Members find the AA programme works whether they are agnostic or atheist.

AA began in the USA and the founding members recognised that not every alcoholic would necessarily identify with, or even wish to associate with, a Christian belief system. Hence the phrase "Higher Power". Today AA's membership includes people of all religious beliefs, atheists and agnostics.

The 12 Steps are a spiritual programme and spirituality in AA is not necessarily religious, more a process of awakening to an inner source of guidance, strength and wisdom which, when drawn upon, can help recovering alcoholics' lives take on new meaning.

A message for professionals

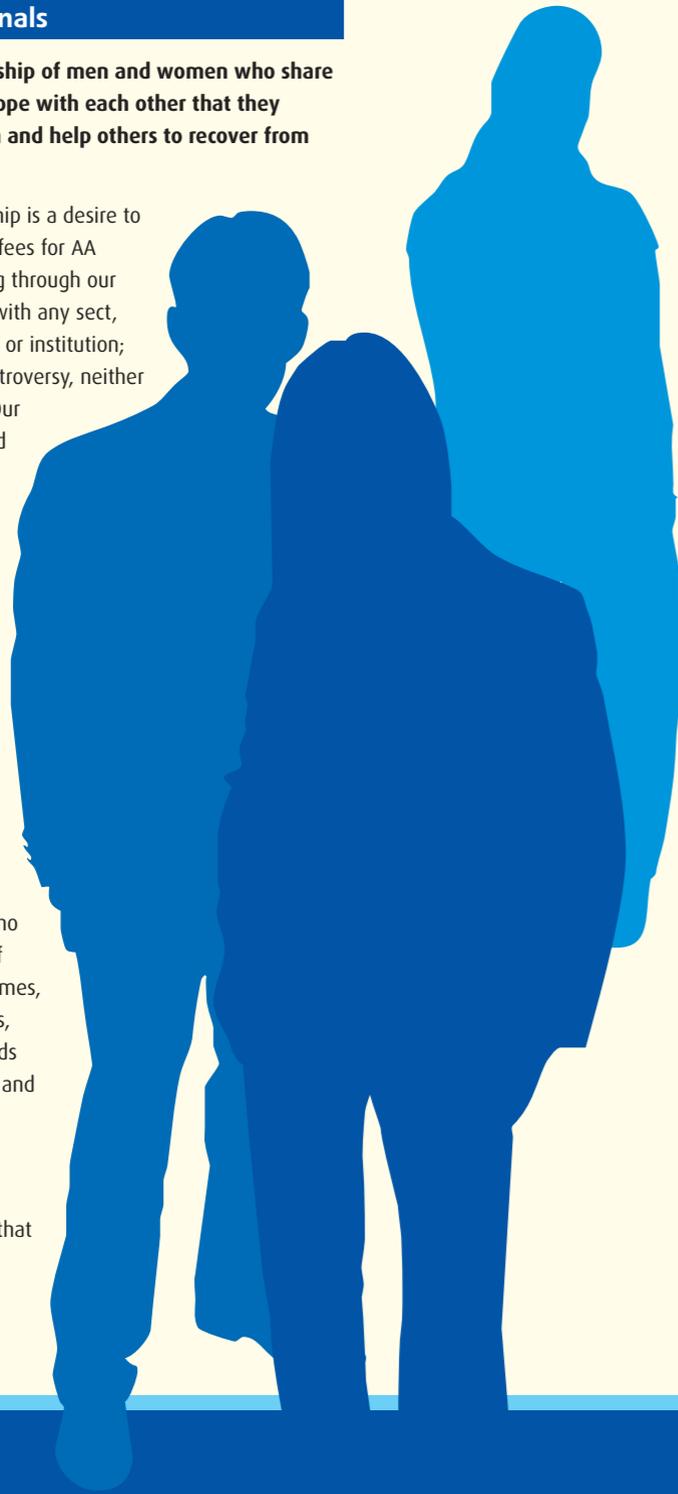
Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Long before Alcoholics Anonymous came into existence in this country in 1947, doctors, hospitals, churches and other organisations and individuals were helping alcoholics. We of AA are profoundly grateful for the unselfish dedication of people like these – that is, people like you – to the welfare of people like us.

Our founder members were influenced and helped by people who were not alcoholics: most famous of these were Carl Jung and William James, but there were and are many others, not least the family members, friends and professionals who often rescue and befriend alcoholics.

Obviously it is not true that only an alcoholic can help an alcoholic. Our individual histories clearly show us that non-alcoholics do many things for alcoholics that AA does not do.



Our aim

Our aim is to inform you about Alcoholics Anonymous and how our 12-Step programme can help problem drinkers recover from alcoholism. AA in Great Britain has more than 50 years of experience involving tens of thousands of alcoholics. This mass of intensive first-hand experience with all kinds of problem drinkers in all phases of active alcoholism and recovery is available free.

There is no referral time for Alcoholics Anonymous. A first step can be a call to the National Helpline Number **0800 917 7650** and this can enable a client to attend a nearby AA meeting on the same day or shortly thereafter.

Who runs Alcoholics Anonymous?

The organisational structure of AA is quite different from other agencies. Members themselves, without payment, with the exception of a few paid staff in the three administrative offices, perform all the services voluntarily. There are no rules, no regulations, and no official procedures or official governing authority. Instead, AA is a fellowship of peers, relying on tradition, suggestion and example.

The principal operating unit of AA is the local group. Each group is autonomous, and instead of a promotion ladder of authority, groups rotate leadership and jobs that need to be done to make the meetings friendly and run as smoothly as possible.

AA as a service

This personal, subjective experience of alcoholism is something only an alcoholic can share with another alcoholic. This is why our service is totally confidential and our membership remains anonymous. Traditionally, this reminds us always to place principles before personalities. Members of Alcoholics Anonymous have found that trying to help other alcoholics in their unique but often effective way is good for them, whether or not the alcoholic they are trying to help chooses to use what is on offer. AA groups attempt to concentrate on an informal person-to-person approach with anyone for whom alcohol is causing problems.

Interesting statistics

Government-assisted agencies estimate that one person in 13 is dependent on alcohol in Britain – twice as many as are hooked on all other forms of drugs.

- 60% of employers say they experience problems due to employees drinking.
- 45% of remand prisoners have significant problems with alcohol.
- Between 60-70% of men who assault their partners do so under the influence of alcohol.
- Some 920,000 children in the UK are living in a home where one or both parents misuse alcohol.
- Child Care and Social Work teams estimate that at least 50% (and some teams up to 90%) of parents on their caseload have either alcohol or drug and mental health problems.
- There is double the risk of divorce in marriages where one or both of the partners drink heavily.

These statistics, drawn from various agencies which deal with alcohol and related issues, are just a small sample of the problems associated with dependent drinkers, impacting on themselves, their families, society, and on the professionals and agencies dealing with health, education and other social issues – probably people like yourselves.

Many of you will regularly see the consequences of alcoholism and alcohol abuse in your work. If you work in the Health Service or Criminal Justice system you will probably see familiar faces returning time after time – seemingly hopeless cases. Many current sober members of AA were thought to be just as hopeless at one time. Today, however, many are sober, responsible members of society through attending AA meetings and practising our 12-Step programme of recovery and, helping others to recover from alcoholism.

How can we help the professionals?

AA has a number of service functions that you can tap into at no financial cost, which have been created to work with professional organisations.

Health – AA works with GPs, hospitals, and treatment centre staff. We offer a variety of services from talks with medical staff to individual contact for patients with a drinking problem.

Prison – arranges for AA members to visit prisons and hold AA meetings for inmates.

Probation / Social Services has a team of AA members who are willing to meet with people on probation and introduce them to AA meetings.

Employers – AA offers a variety of services from talks with employers to individual contact. This could be to a group of managers, human resource teams, or any other group that may benefit from a better understanding of alcoholism.

Public Information co-operates with national and local media and meets with a wide range of organisations to explain how AA works.

Telephone Helplines – This service is available to anyone requiring help or information, and provides initial contact between the problem drinker and Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA availability

There are Alcoholics Anonymous meetings every day and night of the week in all areas throughout the UK and information about these can be obtained by telephoning the General Service Office in York **01904 644026**, the Northern Service Office in Glasgow **0141 226 2214** or the Southern Service Office in London **020 7407 0700**.

Professionals who regularly make use of AA often first do so by getting to know local AA members personally and then possibly by attending open meetings, where visitors are welcome.

What is a typical alcoholic?

In AA's experience there is no such thing as a typical alcoholic. Alcoholism crosses all boundaries – race, religion, age, gender and social background. If you visit an open meeting you will see a cross-section of people. Locally, the meetings will reflect the particular make-up of the area but there is no fundamental difference in the practice of AA from one place to the next. It is suggested to newcomers that they look beyond surface differences and listen to similarities in the vocal sharing that takes place.

Patterns of drinking differ from person to person. Alcoholism can include all types of problem drinking and affects people from all sorts of backgrounds. Alcoholics are adept at denying they have a problem. In the beginning almost all think they do not belong and are unsuitable for membership of AA. It is not until they find themselves attending meetings and hearing other people sharing their experience that they realise how similar they are to their own.

Recovering alcoholics regularly share that their drinking was always, to some extent, abnormal and alcohol was used to boost confidence, change feelings and expel fears. Some people drank for years before the problem became obvious and others for a much shorter time while putting considerable effort into disguising their drink problem.

What does AA cost?

AA is FREE. It costs you and the taxpayer nothing. Each AA group is a self-supporting entity and AA's only income is derived by members making voluntary contributions and by small profits made from the sale of AA publications.

AA does not accept contributions from any outside sources.

After the cost of running meetings and AA's three service offices, surplus money is used to inform the general public about AA and to carry our message to the active alcoholic directly and indirectly through people and organisations such as yourselves.