



## Chat Now Guideline

### Overview of Chat Now

#### General:

The Chat Now Response Service (CNRS) falls under the Electronic Communications Sub-Committee (ECSC) of the General Service Board (GSB) of Alcoholics Anonymous. The ECSC has ultimate responsibility for the activities of CNRS. The CNRS Administrator's role is dependent upon the approval of the appointment of candidates to the ECSC, from the General Service Board of AA Great Britain. The CNRS Administrators will therefore have been nominated and elected to the ECSC before taking over responsibility for the administration of CNRS. It is recommended that there be rotation of the Admin role within the CNRS Service Structure.

#### What is it? How does it work? What are the requirements?

- It is an instant response service to enquiries that come in from the AA website
- Responders pickup the enquiries via Pure Chat
- 2 years continuous sobriety
- Computer literacy
- Good understanding of 12 steps and traditions
- Ability to reply quickly, i.e. start response within 20 seconds
- Able to commit to a weekly shift of one to two hours

As Electronic Communications are now such an important part of our service to the still suffering alcoholic, it must always be borne in mind that the written word could stay in the cyber-domain for as long as the caller chooses to keep it. **This also means that the possibility of our responses finding their way into the public domain (either via social media or the press) is a very real possibility. So we have more need than ever before to be vigilant in our replies.**

Responders are AA members who have 2 years continuous sobriety and have a competent level of computer knowledge and good communication and grammar skills

All applicants are endorsed by either their respective Intergroup, GSR, Region or the ECSC.

Members of the Chat Now Responder Team answer live Chat requests that are received via the Chat Now window on the AA website.

## What we do:

The purpose of the Chat Now function on the AA Website is to provide an instant response service to enquiries that come in from the AA website.

This will initially involve offering the newcomer the National Helpline number and/or a local Helpline number and may include reassurance by explaining how it works, i.e. that they will speak to a recovering alcoholic who will understand, advise and help. If they so wished, the callers details could be passed to a local recovering alcoholic on a first-name confidential basis. Using the caller's name within your replies adds a personal touch. Remember the 0800 number is NOT 24 hrs in all areas.

Should someone say that they cannot get through on the 0800 number, ask where they are calling from. We can then check the availability of that local helpline number.

Whether the offer is accepted or refused, then the AA meeting is then mentioned. We offer meeting details should the suffering alcoholic be ready to get themselves to a meeting.

While we aim to steer a suffering alcoholic towards the Helpline or to meetings, we acknowledge that by its very nature, Chat Now will be an appealing channel of enquiry to suffering alcoholics or others who have questions about what is on offer in AA before being ready to make personal contact.

We should recognise that a caller may be more comfortable with online contact and our experience shows that there are often cases where a suffering alcoholic will respond well to some identification and clarification of what AA has to offer before being gently steered towards the Helpline or meetings. In this respect, the responder will use their own judgement as to whether the conversation is moving towards a practical solution or not.

Our job is to actively 'listen' and understand exactly what is being said and/or asked for by the chat visitor and provide them with as much information as possible in a professional, courteous and helpful way.

## We do not:

- Give medical advice. Nor do we comment on health matters, either explicitly or implied. For example, depression is often associated with alcoholism....
- Tell the Chat Visitor what to do or say – we only ever make suggestions
- Use scare tactics under any circumstances
- Undermine the Chat Visitor in any way
- Engage in arguments
- Show offence, even if you're feeling angry, upset or insulted
- Treat the Chat Visitor harshly or sternly
- React to angry or discourteous messages by responding in a similar fashion
- Include direct links to web sites other than our own to avoid any inference of affiliation.
- We may send links to AAGB and overseas General Service Offices and these can be found on our website: <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Contact>
- E-mail addresses or telephone numbers may however be used in our replies.
- Sponsor from here!
- Use AA jargons and slogans that may confuse the Chat Visitor
- **Pass on any contact or personal details for Responders, Admin or any other AA Member**
- Comment on how groups are run

## Responders should

- Look carefully through the incoming message and identify any specific vulnerabilities that may need addressing for example, cannot get to a meeting
- Try to answer any questions asked relating to AA
- Give the 0800 number letting the enquirer know that it may not be 24 hrs in all areas.
- Where the area has been provided by the caller, offer Local helpline and times manned
- Be understanding, compassionate and tolerant in all instances
- Remember that your messages, once sent, are in the public domain for as long as the chat visitor chooses, may be copied, and it could open to any form of public exhibit just as the visitor may wish to publicise it
- Always be mindful of the responsibilities we assume as responders when dealing with those asking for help. If we try to ensure that we act with integrity and in accordance with our Traditions, we will not go far wrong.

*In sections below, (CR) indicated that there is a Canned Response available, which can be used or adapted to aid quick responses.*

### ***Suffering Alcoholics***

1. Give them a Helpline number to ring so they can get a 12-Step call
2. Provide them with information about meetings so they could go straight there if they wish.  
Indicate the meeting finder pane at the top of the page, or post a link to the AA meeting finder (CR). If the caller gives a locality, then meeting information can be copied from the meeting finder and posted into the chat response.
3. When posting meeting details, ideally 1-3 meetings should be posted to avoid overwhelming the caller, unless circumstances require otherwise.
4. Share our experience, strength and hope where appropriate
5. Offer links to relevant AA Newcomers literature (CR)
6. *Note that if any information is given, the caller can be informed that a transcript may be downloaded when the chat is ended. (CR)*

### ***Recovering Alcoholics***

We also receive enquiries from AA members e.g. wanting meeting details. Again, offer meeting information as above.

Meeting enquiries for Northern Ireland - the meeting finder doesn't cover this area so we offer the website and helpline for Ireland: [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

Contact number: Tel: 028-90351222

### ***General 'sharing'***

We are not here to 12<sup>th</sup> Step, but to try to get suffering alcoholics to the 12<sup>th</sup> Step. Some sharing of our experience with the visitor can provide identification to help them make the decision to try AA. However, sharing on subjects outside AA is a No-No. Experience shows that being able to listen and identify helps the enquirer decide what they wish to do.

## ***Friends and Family***

Many enquiries come from friends or family members with an alcoholic in their lives. These visitors should be thoughtfully and tactfully directed to Al-Anon (CR). We can also provide AA telephone and meeting details and a link to newcomers literature which they can pass onto the alcoholic in their life should they wish to. *Note: Al-Ateen is part of Al-Anon and is for children aged 12 and 17*

Al-Anon Family Groups UK & Eire, 57B Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0BB

E-mail: enquiries@al-anonuk.org.uk Helpline: 020 7403 0888 (10am-10pm daily)

## ***Other Agencies***

AA co-operates with these and has no affiliation to them. We have a “special relationship” with Al-Anon, cemented by both our World Service Conferences as well as the recovery of hundreds of thousands of families. With everyone else, advise that the enquirer uses a search engine to find details as required. We simply pass on the requested information with courtesy and without comment. Please don't recommend other agencies – it only leads to the complication later of... “But AA **told** me!”

## ***Professionals***

Calls from social services, the medical community, legal authorities, colleges and public information sources can be given a link to the Professionals page of the AA-GB Website: <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Professionals> and offered contact details for GSO:

Alcoholics Anonymous,  
PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ.  
Tel. 01904 644026 (Office hours only)  
Email: gso@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

## ***Media***

Any contact from the media should be immediately directed to GSO as above.

## **Callers with other conditions or issues**

### ***Medical Problems***

**With respect to any medical problems, we suggest that enquirers contact their GP or NHS Direct**

AA has no opinion on outside issues. This saves lives. Sometimes callers or their family or carers give us details of medical symptoms with which we are tempted to identify – and to share back our experiences of GPs, alcoholic wards and the like. We cannot give advice and sometimes our sharing of our own medical experiences can be mistaken for the giving of advice.

***What about DTs, shakes and bad hangovers, drying-out, treatment facilities, medical problems?***

*As above*

## Routine for being on duty

**Responder Handover Procedure** -When taking over for your shift, it is helpful for the incoming responder to be ready to take calls early to enable the outgoing responder to end their shift on time.

1. Log on 10-15 minutes early and indicate that you are ready to take over by switching to available
2. The outgoing responder can indicate that they are ready for you to take over by a) *communicating in the Skype group*; b) *sending an Op Chat* or c) *simply switching to unavailable*. Otherwise, do not take any chats before your shift officially starts.
3. If the responder is on any active chats, do not send them an op chat.
4. If no responder is currently live, click on available for chats button.
5. If you are unavailable for even a short time, making coffee or some such, mark yourself as Unavailable, until you return
6. Responders should aim to answer chats within 10 seconds  
*Chats going unanswered for longer periods is not good for the service*
7. Read the enquiry carefully to ensure that you reply to the question asked
8. If you are nearing the end of your shift, you can switch your status to unavailable without interrupting open live chats.
9. Similarly, if you have more than one chat open and have as much as you can manage for the moment, switch status to unavailable while you deal with the current live chats.
10. It is recommended that at three active chats, responders on duty should switch to “unavailable” as to give the current visitors the proper care and attention.
11. Anyone is free to give Ad Hoc cover. Please note the protocol listed under Ad Hoc Shifts
12. New responders will be shadowed for the purpose of mentoring and support.
13. Transcripts of chats may be reviewed to facilitate on-going support and guidance.
14. Should a responder miss their rostered shift for three consecutive weeks without explanation, their shift may be removed from the roster and marked as vacant.

## Ending a session

When finishing a session it is essential to ensure that

- 1) all chats are closed, including those between responders
- 2) Switch your status to Unavailable
- 3) log off Pure Chat

*If we miss any of these steps then we get missed chats on pure chat when there is no one covering*

## Ad Hoc Shifts

Anyone is free to give ad hoc cover. In the case where a Responder is on their rostered shift, the following etiquette should always be observed:

1. Responders switching to available whilst another responder is on a rostered shift should be discouraged unless a) otherwise agreed between both parties or b) to indicate to the outgoing responder that they are available to take over. (See Responder Hand Over Procedure above)
2. Do not send operator Chat requests whilst the active responder is on a live chat.
3. If you are not the rostered responder, please allow the rostered responder at least 10 seconds to pick up incoming chat requests, including second or third chat requests, unless otherwise agreed with the responder.
4. If a chat goes unanswered for more than 10 seconds, another responder can pick it up.
5. It is recommended that at three active chats, responders on duty should switch to “unavailable” as to give the current visitors the proper care and attention.

## Useful Information

Always give 0800 number for suffering alcoholics. If they tell you their location, then give a local helpline number if possible.

While on Pure Chat there is a facility for responders to chat privately.

All responders can see who is logged in at that moment. - note you will also see who has closed browser without logging off!

When getting information, let the visitor know- i.e. “Give me a moment...”

If the caller has got what they need, don't chase them

Give them time to do this at the end of chat, i.e. let them close the chat.

Remember we can receive enquiries from abroad also. The 0800 number is not suitable for them.

When replying do not use ‘text language’