Chat Now Guidelines

I. General:

The Chat Now (CN) Service falls under the First Response Online Sub-Committee (FROSC) of the General Service Board (GSB) of Alcoholics Anonymous. The FROSC has ultimate responsibility for the activities of CN. The CN Administrator role is dependent upon candidate approval from the GSB. The CN Administrators will therefore have been nominated and elected to the FROSC before taking over responsibility for the administration of CN.

CN is an instant response service to online enquiries coming in from the AAGB website. Members of the CN Responder Team answer live chat requests that are received via the chat box on the website. Responders pick up the incoming chats via a live chat platform. The primary purpose of CN is to give the still suffering alcoholic (SA) information about the telephone helpline. Where desired and possible, we can also offer meeting information, either online or physical.

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 chat visitor 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. We have more need than ever before to be vigilant in our replies.

II. What are the requirements for a responder?

1. 2 years continuous sobriety
2. Computer literacy (just the basics!) and access to a laptop or desktop computer
3. Good understanding of the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions
4. Ability to respond to incoming chats quickly
5. Endorsement by Group, Intergroup, or Regional Officer located within one of the 16 Regions of AAGB

III. What we do:

1. We use the training flowchart to simplify our responses and eliminate wordy replies that could lead to confusion.
2. After finding out who the chat visitor is and what they need, a SA is offered the helpline number. (The national number will have automatically be given out at the start of the chat.)
3. Depending on the individual situation, meeting details could also be given.
4. If the visitor is not a SA, but rather a friend or family (FF), the Al-Anon information is given and the suggestion made that they call their helpline for assistance.
5. If the visitor is neither a SA or FF, we try to figure out what exactly the individual needs and direct them to the appropriate source.
6. To the best of our ability, we actively listen to the visitor and provide them with appropriate information in a professional and courteous manner.

IV. We do not:

1. Give medical advice or comment on any health matters, explicit or implied.
2. Tell the chat visitor what to do or say – we only make suggestions.
3. Use scare tactics, argue or undermine the chat visitor in any way.
4. Show offence or use offensive language.
5. Include direct links to web sites, other than AAGB approved links, to avoid any appearance of affiliation.
6. Use AA jargon and/or slogans that may confuse the chat visitor.
7. Pass on any contact or personal details of the CN team members.
8. Take any personal information from the chatter to contact them in the future.
9. Let a chat visitor know that we recognize them as being on the service before, that we can see predictive typing or that we can see their general location.

V. Responders should:

1. Have chat platform, the AAGB website and Skype all open for the entirety of their shift.
2. Following the training flowchart, first ask the visitor if they want to stop drinking.
3. If appropriate, ask the visitor for their town/postcode in order to offer the local helpline.
4. If appropriate, offer them a meeting (max. 2!) – either online or physical.
5. Offer links to information where appropriate.
6. Practice active listening.

VI. Routine for being on duty

1. To help enable the outgoing responder to finish punctually, responders should log in to the chat platform a few minutes before their scheduled shift.
2. Responders should not go online before official shift start time unless the outgoing responder has already gone offline, has their maximum number of chats or there is no one on duty.
3. After an incoming responder goes online, the outgoing responder should go offline to ensure that any new chats are allocated correctly.
4. Responders should always have Skype open during their shift.
5. Responders should go offline when away from the computer, e.g., comfort break, making coffee, answering the door or phone, etc.
6. Responders can switch status to offline without interrupting current chats. This proves helpful when dealing with difficult or complex chats.
7. Responders, after going through an initial trial period of one chat at a time, can decide for themselves how many chats they are comfortable with. Responders should never take more than three chats at a time.
8. If a responder has reached their desired limit of chats, they should post the number 1, 2 or 3, accordingly, in the main CN chat room on Skype. This allows other responders to come online to help with incoming chats.
9. New responders will be shadowed for the purpose of mentoring and support.
10. All transcripts are reviewed to facilitate on-going support and guidance. Once the transcript is deemed to be free of safeguarding issues and/or responder discrepancies, it is deleted. This process takes place every week, depending on the responsible administrator's schedule.
11. Should a responder miss their rostered shift for three consecutive weeks without alerting the admin team, their shift will be removed from the roster and marked as vacant.
12. When ending a shift, it is essential that the responder check that all chats are closed and that they log off.

VII.   Ad Hoc Shifts

1. Any shift that is vacant or needing cover can be taken by responders on an ad hoc basis.
2. Responders can book in advance a vacant shift or a shift that needs cover by messaging the Rota Admin. Ideally, try to book the shift in advance.
3. Two, three or more responders might wish to cover a particular shift together if they choose to share it out. Just go online!

VIII.   Viewing Chats

1. Responders are encouraged to view the chats of other responders. Viewing chats has proven to be the best way to learn how to do the CN service, one of the main tools for training.
2. All responders can benefit greatly from this. In our experience, it helps to see different ways of corresponding and communicating. After a while on this service, we can become a little stale, set in a routine, and might even sound bot-like. We have found it helpful to revitalize and learn different ways of saying things through viewing the chats of teammates. This is a vital tool for both team and self-improvement.

IX.   Service Rotation

1. CN service commitment is 3 years.
2. CN Administrators follow Sub-Committee rotation periods of 4 years.
3. Team members can join the admin team at any time during their service commitment. This will reset their rotation period and a new 3-year cycle will start. (This is done so that the admin team is made up of experienced CN responders and hopefully has the effect that not all admin rotations happen simultaneously.)
4. If an admin team member gives up their admin role, their rotation date will fall back to their original date of joining the team as a responder.
5. After rotation, a one-year break is required before a new responder application can be made.