



## GUIDELINES for A.A. in Great Britain

From the General Service Office, P.O. Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ

### GROUP MEETINGS

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**The Traditions have these words to say on Groups in AA.**

***Tradition 3 (Long Form).*** Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

***Tradition 4 (Long form).*** With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

#### TYPES OF MEETINGS

Whilst a Group is free to hold any type of meeting its members decide, Groups must work within A.A.'s Traditions and Guidelines. Our experience indicates that we must exercise certain precautions at our meetings or risk collapse.

**THE CLOSED MEETING** is for alcoholics only. Usually these are informal discussions devoted to members' problems and questions, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, the Twelve Concepts, topics suggested by articles in the magazines 'Share', 'Roundabout' and 'Grapevine' etc. Many other formats are used but common to all meetings is the sharing of the Experience, Strength and Hope of its members

In many meetings it is the practice for the Chair to introduce speakers who relate what they were like, what happened in their lives and contrast this with what they are like now. This provides ready opportunity for identification by the newcomer and provides an encouraging and hopeful illustration of the possibility for their own personal recovery.

**THE OPEN MEETING** is one at which non-members (partners, friends and other interested people e.g. doctors, spiritual

leaders and social workers etc) may attend. Some Groups feel it is important to balance the programme, making sure that both men and women members, young and old in years and in sobriety, are on the panel of speakers. The Chair and speakers are, of course, all members of A.A. but, in any subsequent discussion, participation by non-members is welcome.

**THE MULTI-MEETING GROUP** is an A.A. Group that accepts responsibility for providing more than one meeting per week. The General Service Conference has recommended the establishment of such groups where favourable circumstances exist and the Group conscience approves. Examples of such circumstances are where:

- premises are already shared by Groups or where a number of Groups meet in the same area
- Group conscience has decided that the Group has developed to a point where further weekly meetings are needed and could be maintained
- there is a shortage of Group officers-e.g. in rural areas with a number of small groups. Because multi-meeting groups require a fewer total number of officers

they are also an effective means of freeing members to become involved in other service activities.

The meetings that constitute the multi-meeting Group are assisted in fulfilling the needs of the Group by a Steering Committee comprised of Group Officers and representatives from the constituent meetings. These Steering Committee Officers – i.e. Chair, Treasurer, Literature Sec. etc. as set out in the Guideline No 2 Group Officers – are elected from members of the constituent groups at a Group Conscience meeting attended by members or representatives of all these constituent groups.

To protect the Unity of the multi-meeting Group and to ensure that each constituent meeting of the Group accepts and implements decisions made at the Group Conscience/Business assemblies, it is vital that all of the constituent meetings be represented at these assemblies.

It has been found that there is *Unity* in multi-meeting Groups providing that the application of the principle of rotation of steering-committee officers is observed in order to avoid personalities becoming established at the expense of the Groups' welfare: also, that regular Conscience and Business meetings are held.

Disadvantages have been found when Group Conscience has permitted personalities to compromise Unity or where geographical location has compromised close liaison.

**THE GROUP CONSCIENCE & BUSINESS MEETINGS** are sometimes overlooked but they play an important part in our Group progress. Some Groups schedule these meetings several times a year. Depending on the wishes of the members, they may precede or follow the normal meeting or separate sessions may be arranged.

**Business** meetings provide an opportunity for Group officers to report on such matter as progress, future plans, Intergroup matters and

the financial position. The Group may also take this occasion as an opportunity to appoint its officers and to conduct a **Group Conscience** meeting – which usually takes the form of a Group inventory.

**A HOME-GROUP** is the group for meetings in which members feel most *at home*. In such Groups they accept service responsibilities, sustain friendships and celebrate anniversaries.

**THE PUBLIC MEETING** places emphasis on informing the general public about A.A. These are speaker-type meetings. Invitations are issued to persons who may have a specific interest, such as doctors, social workers, spiritual leaders and others who may have cause to refer to A.A. in the course of their daily work. In addition to the member-Chair and speakers, a guest is usually invited - frequently a friend of A.A., whose professional work involves them in the field of alcoholism - or perhaps an Al-Anon member to outline the family aspect. Such a meeting is an excellent way to celebrate Group anniversaries.

**THE SHARED PLATFORM MEETING** is an A.A. meeting where non A.A. speakers are involved and should be chaired by an A.A. member. Tickets and programmes should include a statement as to whether Al-Anon / Al-Ateen speakers are involved.

#### THE ANONYMITY TRADITION

At open, public and shared platform meetings, it is considered advisable to stress the importance of our Anonymity Tradition No. 11 as a precaution, should any members of the press or other communication media be present.

AA members remain anonymous in public for two reasons:

- our promise of privacy to the still-suffering alcoholic and to the family
- a spiritual reason summed up in Tradition 12 or in the word “humility”.

## **PARTICIPATION**

The sole purpose of an A.A. Group is to offer sobriety through the teachings and practice of the Twelve Steps. To help achieve this objective it is desirable that as many members as possible who wish to participate in the discussions and service should be encouraged to do so.

The meeting most likely to attract and keep members is the one which starts on time, which has its stock of literature well displayed, where the seating is ready and where members of an unofficial “welcoming committee” are ready to help pass the message, each in their own way. There will be a warm welcome for all comers and in particular for the newcomer, ensuring that the newcomer is made aware of the possibilities and promises contained in the programme. Ultimately, the strength of any meeting depends on the support and involvement of the entire Group.

### **“WHERE TO FIND A.A.”**

“Where to Find A.A.” is the national meeting directory for Great Britain and, as such, is an invaluable source of information for the new member and the travelling member. In order to ensure that it remains accurate, Group secretaries are requested to keep the General Service Office informed of any changes in the address of the meeting place, the starting time of the meeting or the telephone contact numbers for the meeting.

Members whose names appear in the “Where to Find” should be prepared to take full responsibility as contacts and delegate where necessary. This implies that such a telephone number will be freely available within the Fellowship and that the contact is prepared at any time to:

- accept a call for help
- give information to a professional e.g. a GSO number

- guide a family member to the right source for help e.g. to Al-Anon
- speak to members of the Fellowship enquiring about meetings.

## **OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE AND PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL**

*Tradition 5* (Long Form) quotes Bill W’s words “Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose* - that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

Where problems arise from the attendance of non-alcoholics at AA meetings, it is suggested that the above words are remembered and the following extract from the AA pamphlet “Problems other than Alcohol” is read out and, if appropriate, printed copies are distributed:

“Now there are certain things that A.A. cannot do for anybody regardless of what our several desires or sympathies may be. Our first duty as a society is to ensure our own survival. Therefore we have to avoid distractions and multi-purpose activity. An A.A. Group as such cannot take on all the personal problems of its members let alone the problems of the whole world. Sobriety - freedom from alcohol - through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps is the sole purpose of an A.A. Group. Groups have repeatedly tried other activities and they have always failed. It has also been learned that there is no possible way to make non-alcoholics into A.A. members.

We have to confine our membership to alcoholics and we have to confine our A.A. Groups to a single purpose. If we don’t stick to these principles, we shall almost surely collapse, and if we collapse, we cannot help anyone.”

Although these words were written by Bill W. in 1958 they continue to offer sound guidance on this difficult subject.