

DRAFT

A brief guide to AA - AA leaflet 3540 (revised)

Conference 2025

I am Responsible...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,

I want the hand of AA always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible.

AA TRIANGLE (to be inserted on production of leaflet)

AA Preamble

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.

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What is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism is recognised as a major health problem. In the UK it ranks alongside heart disease and cancer – and it does not damage alcoholics alone. Others are hurt by its effects – in the home, at work and on the roads. Alcoholism costs the community millions of pounds every year. So, whether or not you ever become an alcoholic yourself, alcoholism still can have an impact on your life.

AA has learned a great deal about how to identify and arrest alcoholism. It has always maintained that alcoholism is an illness. Both the British and American Medical Associations now agree that this is the case. Doctors and scientists in the field have not agreed on the cause (or causes) of alcoholism, and in the UK, doctors call it 'alcohol use disorder' or 'alcohol dependence'. So far, no one has discovered a way to prevent it because we do not know why some drinkers turn into alcoholics and others do not.

Most importantly, alcoholics cannot control their drinking and if they do not stop, their alcoholism always gets worse.

What are the symptoms and signs?

Not all alcoholics necessarily have the same signs, but the following examples are typical of what we may expect as the illness progresses:

- find that only alcohol can make them feel self-confident and at ease with other people
- often want just one more drink
- think about drinking a lot
- get drunk when they had not planned to
- try to control their drinking by changing types of drinks, trying and failing to stop
- sneak drinks
- lie about their drinking
- hide bottles
- drink at work
- drink alone
- have blackouts (that is, unable remember the next day what they said or did the night before)
- drink in the morning to relieve hangovers, guilty feelings and fears
- fail to eat and become malnourished
- get liver disease
- get alcohol withdrawal symptoms when stopping abruptly such as shaking violently, hallucinating or even having convulsions

What is AA?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of people who help each other to stay sober. They offer help to anyone who has a drinking problem and wants to do something about it. Since they are all alcoholics themselves, they have a special understanding of each other. They know what the illness feels like – and they have learned how to recover from it in AA, one day at a time.

AA members say that they are alcoholics today, even when they have not had a drink for many years. Alcoholics who have been attending meetings and actively working with others find that they have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. Once people have lost their ability to control their drinking, they can never again be sure of drinking safely. But in AA, they can learn to live happily in sobriety.

How does AA help the Alcoholic?

Members straighten out their confused thinking and unhappy feelings through AA's Twelve Steps of recovery. These Steps suggest ideas and actions that can guide alcoholics toward happy and useful lives.

Members go to AA meetings regularly to stay in touch with other members and newcomers, communicate between meetings, read AA literature and learn about the

recovery programme.

What are AA meetings?

Alcoholics Anonymous in Great Britain and the Continental European Region comprises approximately 5,300 groups. The people in each group get together to hold AA meetings, of two main types;

Closed meetings - where any alcoholic, whether recovering or seeking help for the first time, can get advice and help in relation to getting sober and staying sober, usually by hearing about how other more experienced members have coped with these problems, and relating to their experiences. These are for people who are worried about sharing their experiences in front of people who are not alcoholics, or who are worried about anonymity.

Open meetings - are much the same as closed meetings, but anyone can attend, including members' and prospective members' friends or family who wish to support them and professionals who are interested in seeing AA in action. At open meetings members may not share so much about themselves as at closed meetings, particularly when such sharing might make them feel distressed in front of non-alcoholics. No-one should ever feel under pressure to share about themselves at any AA meeting. See 'The AA Group' leaflet, the 'Anonymity' leaflet, and Tradition 12.

Who belongs to AA?

Alcoholism affects all sorts of people – young and old, from all backgrounds, professions, nationalities and cultures. Most meetings have a thorough mix of people with all sorts of backgrounds. No-one is excluded from an AA meeting. The focus is helping each other to achieve and maintain sobriety.

How did AA start?

AA was started in 1935 by a New York stockbroker and an Ohio surgeon, who were both alcoholics. They were introduced to each other and found a way of becoming and staying sober. They found they could help other alcoholics based on their experiences and the programme of recovery gradually emerged, with the formation of meetings across the USA and then eventually in other countries. The book 'Alcoholics Anonymous' was first published in 1939. This sets out the programme and includes stories from members wishing to share their experiences.

Do you have to lose everything before you need to join AA?

No, though some alcoholics are in that situation before they join. In the early days, most AA members had been seriously ill; their drinking had sent them to hospitals, mental institutions or jails. As more and more people began to hear about AA, many alcoholics found they did not have to let their illness do too much damage. They could recover in AA before their health had been totally wrecked, and while they still had their jobs and families.

Who runs AA?

Each group is free to work out its own format for holding meetings, as long as it does not harm other groups or AA as a whole. The members elect a chairperson, a secretary and other group officers. These positions are rotated at regular intervals to allow newer members to feel part of the running of the group. These officers hold no authority and give no orders; their job is to see that the meetings run smoothly and effectively.

Just as AA members help each other, so do AA groups. Here are some of the means by which they do this:

- no-one in AA is set in authority above anyone else
- groups in the same area set up an intergroup attended by elected representatives of the groups
- intergroups in turn belong to regions where meetings are attended by elected members of the intergroups
- groups, intergroups and regions can share their experiences by keeping in touch with service sub committees, and the AA General Service Office in York
- regions in Great Britain, including Continental European Region, choose delegates to go to the AA General Service Conference, held once a year
- the delegates at Conference make suggestions, based on the experiences of many different AA groups. But they do not make rules or issue commands to any groups or members

Does AA membership cost anything?

There are no dues or fees for AA membership. Money is needed, however, for some purposes such as renting meeting rooms, buying tea, coffee and other refreshments, buying AA books, pamphlets, and AA magazines. A collection is usually taken during a group meeting, and members put in whatever they can afford or wish to give. If they can afford nothing, that is fine too. Groups also contribute money to support the General Service Office, Conference recommendations and other AA activities.

For 12th step work - help that members give to other alcoholics – there is no financial payment. Their reward is something much better than money – it is their own sobriety. AA members have found that helping other alcoholics is the best way to stay sober themselves.

AA Great Britain is a registered charity, and as such finances are regulated and are transparent.

Is there support for the families and friends of alcoholics?

AA is just for alcoholics, but **Al-Anon** can help their relatives or friends.

Alcoholics Anonymous does not:

- run membership drives to try and persuade alcoholics into joining. AA is for alcoholics who *want* to get sober
- keep personal details of its members
- run any hospitals, wards, treatment centres or provide nursing or social services
- give out medical or psychiatric advice
- interfere with treatment being given to members
- accept money from sources outside AA, either private or government. It is entirely self supporting

Alcoholics Anonymous is not:

- a religious organisation. It follows a spiritual programme. All members are free to decide on their own personal beliefs or non-beliefs
- a medical organisation

Alcoholics Anonymous:

- helps alcoholics to help themselves
- lives up to the 'anonymous' part of its title. No-one attending an AA meeting ever needs to worry about their identity being disclosed to anyone else
- co-operates with other organisations, but is not formally connected with them. Some members work for such organisations but as individuals, not as representatives of AA

How can you find out more about AA?

Contact details to be inserted on production of leaflet

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood

- him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.
 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. AA, as such, ought never be organised; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.