

Messaging App Guidelines

These guidelines contain helpful experience for members who want to use Messaging Apps, in general and/or for AA service.

Messaging Apps are a standard way for people to communicate with each other online, either individually or in groups. Downloadable from any App Store and easily installable on a mobile phone, tablet or computer, popular Apps already being used include WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Google Chat, Signal, Telegram and many more (note: as per our traditions, AA does not endorse nor is affiliated with any of these Apps). Messaging App technology moves fast with new Apps being developed every day.

As AA members, we have additional things to consider when using Messaging Apps. The following guidelines provide guidance on how to use Messaging Apps in a private, safe, and secure way and in alignment with our Twelve Traditions.

It is important to always remember that, and for many different reasons, some members will not be able to use Messaging Apps. Groups may therefore want to consider how these members can still be part of the group's communications and participate in all group activities.

References:

- The AA Group
- Understanding Anonymity
- Hints and Suggestions on Internet Safety

Please also see more information on Safeguarding, which is available on our website.

Individual Members

It is recommended to only download and install the official Messaging App and always ensure it is up to date.

Further suggestions on how to ensure your privacy, safety and security while using Messaging Apps can usually be found in the Help section on the various Apps own website and covers areas such as: protecting your account, blocking and reporting, spam, scams and suspicious links.

Members may want to consider whether they use just their first name or an alias. Some Apps also offer the option to hide your phone number, which can usually be activated in the App settings.

Groups

AA groups, including service groups at intergroup and region, may want to use Messaging Apps to communicate with their members. These Apps provide the ability to create “groups” or “communities” that usually consist of at least one administrator and several members. These “group chats” can range from a few members to many thousands.

More suggestions on how to create and manage group chats can be found in the Messaging App help sections and include information on topics such as starting a group chat, adding and removing members, leaving a group chat, and general troubleshooting.

Some groups may want to make use of additional features such as disappearing messages, enabling posting only by admins, having private member lists (hidden phone numbers), etc.

Experience has shown that setting clear objectives for the group chat at the beginning can be helpful, to ensure that the group chat conversations stay relevant and on topic. Defining the purpose and administration responsibilities of the group chat ought to be done through the group conscience.

Always keep in mind:

- Membership of a group chat is not the same as membership of AA or an AA group, i.e. people can be members of an AA group and not members of the group chat.
- Groups chats ought not be a replacement for regular Business Meetings or Group Conscience decisions, as not all eligible members may be able to participate and/or vote.

Group Administrators

Group service position holders often make good group chat administrators as they are trusted servants elected by the group, are accountable to the group conscience, and will rotate out of service at the end of their term.

Groups could also elect a dedicated officer to manage the group chat.

Suggested requirements for the administrator role would be a good working understanding of both electronic communications technology and the Twelve Traditions.

Adding New Members

It is advisable for the AA group to decide in advance on how and when to add new members to the group chat, remembering that group chats ought to be voluntary, private and specific.

Always ask the new member first if they would like to be added to the group chat and consider sending an invitation link rather than adding them directly so they can then decide in their own time whether to join or not.

Important: *Be sure the new member understands that, on some Apps, adding their phone number to the group chat will mean it will be visible to all group chat members.*

Clearly communicating the purpose and guidelines of the group chat to new members upon their addition, along with a brief introduction from the admin, can assist with their integration.

It is suggested to also let new group chat members know that they can leave the group chat at any time for any reason, and that doing so will not affect their membership of the group or AA in any way.

Removing Inactive Members

To help protect group members anonymity, privacy and data, many groups will periodically review the group chat and remove inactive members. This can be a sensitive topic for us alcoholics, so it is advisable to proceed with patience and kindness. The following points may be helpful:

- Set a clear policy regarding the removal of inactive members, such as those who have not been active at the group for at least three months.
- Regularly inform group members about the policy for removing inactive users to maintain group effectiveness and relevance.
- Before removing inactive members, consider sending a gentle reminder and / or reaching out personally to understand their situation or reasons for inactivity, if appropriate.
- If an inactive member has been marked for removal, consider sending a final message with details on how one can rejoin the group chat after being removed.

General Considerations

It is recommended to:

- Respect the privacy and anonymity of others and avoid sharing personal contacts, messages or media without consent.
- Be courteous in your communication, especially in group chats related to service.
- Avoid sending excessive messages, memes, or forwards that may distract or overwhelm the chat.
- Take a moment to consider the content and tone of your message before sending. Remember that written messages may be misinterpreted, so choose your words carefully.
- Avoid sharing anything that may be offensive or inappropriate.

- Be mindful of the topic and purpose of the group. Stay on topic and avoid unrelated discussions.

Example Group Chat Policy

The following is an example of a group chat policy that can be added into their group chat description. Groups are encouraged to create their own policy as per the group conscience.

