

Safety in AA

13th Stepping

Making romantic advances towards new comers while they are still trying to figure out their sobriety.

Here are some examples:

“In 2013, she had 13 years, and I had about one month. I ignored my sponsor’s suggestion to avoid her and we went out on a couple of dates. I would tell her I was going to a meeting, and she would tell me that I didn’t need to do that—that I could go out with her instead, and it would be a “mini meeting”. The last time we hung out, she wanted to have sex with me, I refused. I felt ashamed and humiliated. She “broke it off” the next day. I struggled to go to meetings I knew she attended and soon, stopped going altogether. I have 81 days sober today.”

“I met someone at a meeting and we really hit it off. We had fun and spent a lot of time together. At first, we were going to AA meetings and hanging out with AA people, then it seemed our world got smaller. We started doing more things without AA friends and soon we stopped meeting with our sponsors as frequently, started going to meetings only together and once or twice a week, we became each other’s recovery program. We kept getting sicker and sicker. He relapsed and I haven’t seen him in years.”

Group Report Back Solutions:

- **Watch for advances on opposite sex on newcomers/old timers and the chosen group conscious person intervene.**
- **Guide individuals toward same gender identity as sponsors**
- **Suggesting same sex meetings**
- **Home group members be aware of predatory behaviors**
- **Chair persons bringing up the topic of the damage sexual relations in early sobriety can cause as a meeting topic**
- **Watch out for one another**
- **Adding a “hands off policy” in the group format**
- **Ask old timers to share their knowledge with sponsee and group members**
- **Sponsors stress the importance of no relationships in the first year**
- **Practice vigilance**
- **Take responsibility and speak up for safety using gentle words**
- **Couples refraining from touching each other during meetings to set examples**
- **Acknowledge newcomers vulnerability**

Anonymity/Anonymous Breaks

**Keeping the identity of members within the membership.
Here are some examples:**

“I was sitting with my boss at a restaurant having lunch when a member of the program came in and asked if I were going to the meeting tonight. Then proceeded to tell my boss she went to AA too and that we were much better people to around. My boss asked me “Are you in A.A.? I’m not ashamed of my sobriety, but I was certainly not prepared to talk about it with my boss.”

“I had an accident and needed to be in the hospital for a few nights for observation. I was pretty excited when my gang of AA friends showed up. When the nurse came in to check on me, one of them said we are just having an AA meeting in here, we are used to interruptions. My care changed. The nurses later questioned my history with medication”.

“I was on Facebook and noticed so & so announced their sobriety and thanked Bill W. and Dr. Bob. Does everyone who liked or loved it go to AA? Where is the anonymity in that?”

Group Report Back Solutions:

- **Anonymity does not place anyone above the law**
- **Group conscious to determine appropriate language for explaining anonymity (language that can be easily understood by new comers)**
- **No posting anniversaries or other AA business on social media sites**
- **Group conscious about how to handle anonymity if emergency services need to be called (police, fire fighter, ems)**
- **be honest with PCP/doctors**
- **Be clear what your stance on anonymity is to fellow members**
- **provide directions if someone wants to or does not want to be on the group contact list**

Gossip

**Talking about others in ways you wouldn’t talk directly to them.
Here are some examples:**

“She told people I was pregnant before I was sure I was keeping the baby, it put pressure on me and I stopped going to meetings because I think people were judging me. It was my news to tell.

Now I have a year again and I'm keeping my stuff safe from blabber mouths, unfortunately you never know who that might be, so I don't speak at meetings"

"I was a part of that group for years and some of the people didn't like the way I handled my personal relations and began to talk about me to new comers and most of the talk wasn't true- I am not comfortable going there anymore. I'm lucky I had some tools to keep me sober while I found a new "home"."

"The AA program led me to realize that gossip (talk about anyone for any reason) is morally wrong. I can often feel that there is something wrong in the things I say about other people, because of the guilt and discomfort I later feel. Since gossiping **DOES** produce guilt and shame, why do I do it? It is an attempt to build myself up at the expense of others. My love for gossip (talking about anyone outside of me) is inversely proportional to my own self-esteem and sense of security. The more inadequate I feel, the more I need to belittle others and tear them down with my words. My sponsor shared with me that I should share what I know to be true, not what I think or have heard."

Group Report Back Solutions:

- **Don't engage in conversations ask "would you like it if we were talking behind your back?"**
- **Speak more about gossip at meetings**
- **Not our business to share other people's stories**
- **Keep our singleness of purpose in the front of our minds. We are here to stop drinking just for today**
- **Distinguish between helpful conversation about newcomers and gossip**
- **Communication between sponsor/sponsee**
- **There are 2 kinds of business: my business AND none of my business**
- **Meetings should be safe for sharing. Please do not share personal things you heard in meetings with others**
- **Does it need to be said? Does it need to be said now? Does it need to be said by me?**
- **Remember: One finger pointing at you is 3 pointing back at me**
- **Simple consent: check with others before sharing their business**

Cross talk

Cross talk is interrupting, commenting specifically to another person in the room or referring to another person's sharing.

Here are some examples:

"When I was sharing at my meeting last month, I was talking about how hard it is to have a conversation with my spouse about the importance of meetings. It talks about it in the Big Book and I wanted to hear more about best ways to deal with it. So & so said "she will never get it, stick around and you'll see". I was uncomfortable. I felt singled out. Then I was worried what if I saw so & so in public- would he say something to her?"

“I am new and when I went to my first few meetings it was difficult to feel like I fit in, probably like everyone else has felt. I raised my hand and said my name is so & so, I think I am an alcoholic. I was a little embarrassed when everyone clapped and yelled out “welcome”. Every person who talked afterward talked to me and referred to me. I was more uncomfortable then before. I could barely stand myself and everyone saying my name or talking to me made me feel like I was different. My new sponsor said, “they were trying to help you see that you were among your own kind”. that feeling is still pretty foreign to me and calling me out made me feel different.

“Commenting on my share is unsolicited advice, which nearly took me out of the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous 2 decades ago. Most times I just want to share my truth without commentary from anyone. I just want it out of my head. No need to reinforce my disease with yours.”

Group Report Back Solutions:

- **Provide info to meetings and groups about cross talk**
- **Keep topic on the topic (rather than going off topic)**
- **Group members responsible for stopping someone who may be talking about someone else’s share**
- **Good sponsorship conversation**
- **If group allows cross talk (a beginners meeting encourages new comers to ask questions of the chair/commitment to drive the meeting topic)**
- **When a person is sharing, no need to verbally agree with them during or after their share.**

Bullying

**Bullying in AA is unwanted, aggressive behavior
Here are some real-life situations:**

“I was at my home group business meeting, and was sharing something that seemed dangerous that was going on during the meeting. We had a member talking about his guns and how many he had and his strong distaste for some of the members of A.A. While some of my home group members laughed about it (probably out of nervousness), I was afraid. With everything going on in the world today, I shared that I wanted my home group to be a safe zone. Somewhere I could feel safe from the big bad world. I didn’t feel safe during the meeting and I was beginning to question if I were safe in my home group meetings. I felt alone. Who is the bully, my home group members or the guy with the guns?”

“When you insist on hugging me, my PTSD is triggered and I lose sight of what I am doing in Alcoholics Anonymous. When you ask me if you can hug me I feel like I have a choice.”

“I was returning to AA for the 3rd time and it was great to see some of the people I had been sober with in the past. Some of the old curmudgeons were still there, and good for them, but when I was drilled with questions of “didn’t get any better, huh?” “Didn’t I tell you not to hang out in that barber shop?” “Have you had enough yet? I wanted to run from the room, from meetings as a whole and blame them for my struggles with sobriety. Thankfully I stayed and heard from my sponsor – “ignore so & so, he doesn’t mean any harm” I believed that was true but I am supposed to be accountable for my behavior, doesn’t he have to be?”

“Discounting my thoughts and feelings with your experience is being a bully!”

Group Report Back Solutions:

- **Respect others opinions**
- **Call out bad behavior in private**
- **Call group conscious right away**
- **Be clear “stop or we will invite you to leave”**
- **Have a group conscious about who will be responsible to ask a person to leave or take a disruptive person outside**
- **Add safety to the admin notes (format of meeting)**
- **Ask before hugging or touching anyone**
- **Sponsorship is where education about appropriate hugging/touching begins**
- **Be nice to relapsers**
- **Bring these topics up in meetings**

Welcoming New Comers and Old Timers

What is your group doing to welcome new comers & old timers?

Do you call them OR is it their responsibility to call you?

How were you welcomed into Alcoholics Anonymous?

How do feel as an old timer in meetings you attend outside of your normal routine?

Group Report Back Responses:

- **Greeters at the door**
- **Respect the new comers**
- **Provide phone numbers for newcomers**
- **Listen rather than doing all of the talking**
- **New comer liaison**
- **Introduce yourself to someone who you have not seen before**
- **Offer beginners packet**
- **Practice empathy**

What is your groups conscious for dealing with safety in the meeting?

Do you have a procedure in place for calling 911?

What happens if medical attention is needed?

Does the meeting continue?

Where do meeting attendees go if they do not want to be seen by emergency personal?

Do you report illegal behaviors to the police?

Whose responsibility is it to make sure safety is present in the meetings?

Does your meeting place have an active shooter protocol in place?

Group Report Back Responses

- **Find out if the meeting place has an active shooter plan in place**
- **Find out if the meeting place allow guns on the property**
- **Group conscious to identify a safe meeting place at meeting location**
- **Identify where people can go if they do not want to be seen in meetings if police/fire/ems need to be called**