

Violence and Personal Conduct

AA's Pledge
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.

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“Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a greater whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows closely afterwards.” – Tradition One (Long Form)

Some people come into AA meetings unaware of what behaviors are appropriate and which are not. Behavior that disrupts the group’s ability to carry out our primary purpose, or which directly endangers those present, threatens unity and recovery.

Violence in any form, including all forms of harassment – sexual, within meetings and online – is not acceptable at any level of our structure. Members have the right to feel secure and safe in meetings and whilst going about AA service/business. It is the group’s responsibility to ensure that no member or visitor is subjected to or experiences bullying, harassment or offensive behavior. These are unacceptable and in conflict with the AA Traditions and our way of life in recovery and are not appropriate.

Responses to incidents must be measured and reasonable. Members should not place themselves in physical danger or open to legal repercussions. When a personal approach or a statement from the meeting chair fails to rectify inappropriate or disruptive behavior, or if the situation is sufficiently serious or complex, it may be necessary to involve members from outside the group. If an incident cannot be defused

quickly and safely, groups should consider involving appropriate agencies – e.g. police.

If the group conscience deems it necessary, unacceptable behavior may result in temporary exclusion from the group. The decision on return of the offender rests with the group conscience. Groups may wish to display a “clear statement” and to conduct regular group consciences addressing inappropriate behavior. Troup officers and members ought to be prepared in advance and provided with information about what to do in the event of difficult behavior, as well as the reassurance of knowing that they have the full support of the group conscience to deal with it.

Sources and additional information:

1. 2015 General Service Conference Report, Committee 5, Question 1
2. “Safety in AA: Our Common Welfare” (New Hampshire, US, General Service Workshop 2012)
3. Tradition 1, “Twelve Traditions Illustrated”, pamphlet
4. “44 Questions”, Pamphlet, page 16
5. “The AA Group”, pamphlet, page 24
6. Alcoholics Anonymous, page 97

Suggestions:

Groups which have experience with inappropriate and disruptive behavior from persons in attendance have utilized a variety of strategies and actions to address the problem effectively.

These include:

- If someone sharing offensively (eg. Obscene, racist, personal, threatening etc.), the chair may say something like: “Thank you for sharing, but you are being offensive. Could you please stop now?”
- If someone is present who has been drinking and creating a disruption, the chair may say something like “You are welcome at this meeting, but you have been drinking and it is the conscience of this group that shares be limited to those who are sober today.”
- If someone is disrupting the meeting, the chair may say something like: “Would you mind keeping quiet please, as there are other people here who want to hear the message?”

OR:

“If you continue to disrupt the meeting I will have to ask you to leave.”

- If someone continues to disrupt the meeting, the chair may say something like: “I am now asking you to leave. If you don’t leave, I will call the police and have you removed.”

OR:

The chair may ask an old-timer, the GSR or other home group members to go outside and call the police.

Meeting chairs are advised to think carefully before any intervention. But please remember that the common welfare of the group has to

come before the individual. The meeting cannot revolve around one person. There is often more than one newcomer at each meeting wanting to hear the solution. These situations seldom arise during meetings, but it is helpful to be prepared. The chair must have the full backing of the group through regular group consciences. The group may also wish to have statements regarding appropriate behavior read as part of the meeting format.

In cases of persistent inappropriate/predatory sexual/threatening/violent behavior that prevents carrying of the AA message, groups may also refer to the following by Bill W: "This amount of charity does not mean that we cannot exclude those who disturb meetings in progress or seriously interfere with the functioning of the group. Such people can be asked to quiet down or go elsewhere, or, to come back when they are better able to participate. (Letter from Bill W, 1969)

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