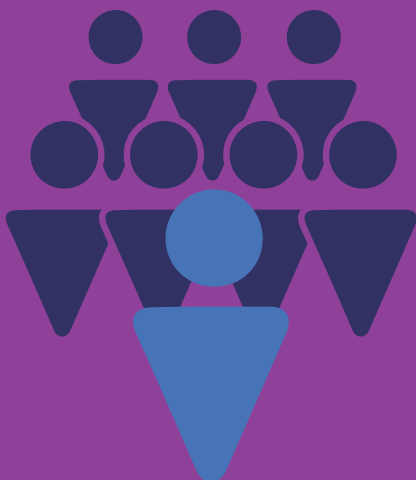
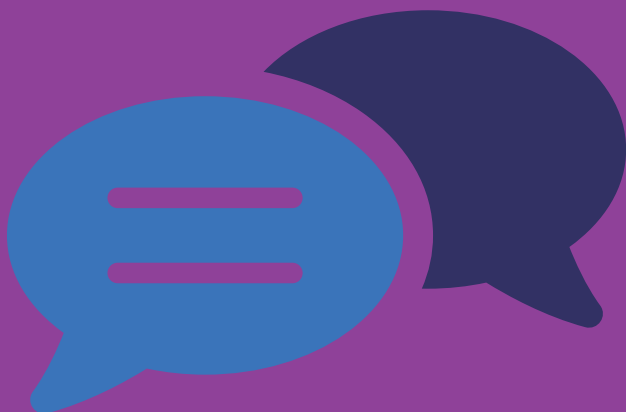


Speaking at Meetings **Outside** of A.A.



This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of people 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 A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization 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.

*Copyright © by AA Grapevine, Inc.,
reprinted with permission.*

Copyright © 2024
by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Mail address:
Box 459, Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

www.aa.org

Speaking at Meetings Outside of A.A.

Contents

Introduction	7
Singleness of Purpose	8
Types of Non-A.A. Meetings	8
Who Should Present?	10
How to Share About A.A.	10
Brief Outline for a Talk	14
Frequently Asked Questions	17
Responsibilities of A.A. for Keeping People Informed	20
Twelve Traditions	21

Introduction

A.A. groups and central offices/intergroups everywhere receive an increasing number of requests for A.A. members to speak outside and beyond A.A. meetings. Various professional organizations want to know more about the A.A. approach to alcoholism. These requests have brought forth many queries from A.A. members about “Should I?” “What to say?” and “How to say it?”

It is hoped that this pamphlet will offer guidance and a look at some of the important related A.A. principles that support our many efforts at providing information about A.A. to the general public.

Singleness of Purpose

In speaking at non-A.A. meetings we need to be mindful of A.A.'s single purpose. A.A. co-founder Bill W. reminded us that:

“There are those who predict that A.A. may well become a new spearhead for a spiritual awakening throughout the world. When our friends say these things, they are both generous and sincere. But we of A.A. must reflect that such a tribute and such a prophecy could well prove to be a heady drink for most of us — that is, if we really came to believe this to be the real purpose of A.A., and if we commenced to behave accordingly. Our Society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose: the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Let us resist the proud assumption that since Higher Power has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of recovery for everybody.”

A.A. Comes of Age (Page 232)

Types of Non-A.A. Meetings

A large proportion of today's newcomers are making their first approach to A.A. at the suggestions of a nonalcoholic well-wisher — a doctor, faith leader, lawyer, social worker, employer, union representative, relative, friend or other concerned party to whom A.A. has become favorably known.

Many organizations and institutions ask A.A. members to provide presentations, including schools, hospitals, law offices, mental health organizations, and others that wish to learn more about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Depending on your local area or region you may also receive requests from organizations such as cultural associations and police departments to a local American Sign Language School

or an indigenous population school among many other examples. In keeping with our Traditions, we are ready to cooperate, although not affiliate, with these organizations, in order to carry the message to the still sick and suffering.

Does our presence at a non-A.A. event help us with our primary purpose?

“A.A.’s Movement-Wide Public Information Policy,” approved by the 1956 General Service Conference was amended in 2002 to read:

“In all public relationships, A.A.’s sole objective is to help still-suffering alcoholics. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making known to still-suffering alcoholics, and to those who may be interested in their problem, our own experience as individuals and as a Fellowship in learning to live without alcohol. We believe that our experience should be made available freely to all who express sincere interest. We believe further that all our efforts in this field should always reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside of A.A. are equally concerned with the serious problem of alcoholism.”

Are we following our Traditions?

Before speaking, you might want to review Traditions Three, Five, Six, Ten and Eleven regarding membership, primary purpose, non-affiliation, outside issues and anonymity. If any doubts about speaking exist, follow our Fourth Tradition by consulting with other groups and/or your local committee prior to accepting the invitation.

Who Should Present?

Speaker choice

Any A.A. member sober in A.A. for a sufficient length of time to discuss our recovery program from a point of experience with the Steps, Traditions, and service should be capable of a good job.

Amateur standing

In talking to non-A.A. professionals or students, A.A. members are careful to preserve their amateur standing and respect for the province of those who deal with alcoholism in their professional capacities. They first mention that they are speaking for themselves rather than A.A. as a whole and that our program of recovery is based on attraction rather than promotion. We do not claim to be experts on the medical, physiological, or psychological aspects of alcoholism. Rather, A.A. members provide information about recovery, rather than promoting the program.

How to Share About A.A.

Know your audience and reason for your invitation.

Before committing to speaking at a meeting outside of A.A., reflect on these questions:

- Who is inviting you, what is their occupation, and what is the organization? What is the inviting group's primary interest in A.A.?
- Why has A.A. been invited to give a talk?
- What, if any, are the cultural norms that need to be observed?
- What language or accessibility solutions need to be considered to present?

- Ask if press/media is going to be in attendance and contact the presenter to inform them of their attendance.
- If attending, meet with the press representative or photographer prior to and at the event to discuss our Tradition of Anonymity.
- How can an A.A. talk be beneficial to the organization?
- How can you carry the A.A. message appropriately for this audience?

To be effective, it is important for the A.A. speaker to be familiar with our literature, history, and program of action. Known as “The Big Book,” the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous has helped millions of people recover from alcoholism since the first edition appeared in 1939. Chapters describing the A.A. recovery program — the original Twelve Steps — and the personal histories of A.A.’s co-founders remain unchanged since the original, while new stories have been added to the personal histories of each edition.

Knowing the history of A.A. can help prepare for frequently asked questions. For any question that you do not have an answer, get contact information from that person and be sure to follow up with an answer later.

The books *Alcoholics Anonymous, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *A.A. Comes of Age* are great reference materials.

Practice Presenting

Consideration might be given to practicing the presentation in advance to gain confidence and expand familiarity with the material to be presented. Knowing your audience can also help you prepare for your presentation, delivery and response to potential questions. Your talk to a class of high school students, group of medical professionals, or an elderly community would vary greatly. Each presentation should be tailored to fit the audience.

Sometimes, an inviting organization may be more concerned with alcoholism, rather than Alcoholics Anonymous. In this instance, your group may refer the request for such a talk to a state or private agency concerned with the broader aspect of alcoholism.

If your group decides to proceed with speaking at a meeting outside of an A.A. meeting, a few precautions should be observed:

- Introduce yourself by first name only.
- Mention the fact that you are speaking for yourself only, not for A.A. as a whole. Any opinions are your own and not A.A.'s.
- Speak to the A.A. Tradition of anonymity prior to and during the meeting. Have the anonymity statement card handy and distribute as appropriate.
- Do not link the A.A. name with other organizations.

Considerations in working with press and media when giving such talks.

On the day of the event, meet with the press representatives again, as you may have spoken with a producer, and a reporter and camera person are attending the meeting. Review the following with the onsite media representatives.

- Those who are reluctant to seek our help often overcome their fear if they are confident their anonymity will be respected.
- If an A.A. member is identified in the media we ask that you please use first names only (e.g., Sofia M. or Ben T.) and that you not use images in which members' faces may be recognized. This helps to provide members with the security that anonymity can bring.
- Anonymity acts as a healthy guardrail for A.A. members, reminding us that we are a program of principles, not personalities.
- Our fellowship does not comment on matters of public controversy, but we are happy to provide information about A.A. to anyone who seeks it.

How To Film Anonymously:

Different techniques have been employed to preserve anonymity on TV: masks; screens; back-lighting that shows A.A.s as only silhouettes; camera angles showing them only from the back. The "shadow" method is simple, relaxed — and appropriate. For we are not selling personalities — we are explaining A.A. Personal anonymity breaks in the public media

not only may discourage timid prospects; they may threaten the anonymity-breaker's own sobriety by violating the spirit of the A.A. program and Traditions.

Contact through Media Platforms

Today, contact through the media is part of everyday life, and speaking at meetings outside of A.A. may include using various digital media platforms. This may include invitations to communicate with students, as well as public relations professionals and those in the helping professions.

Therefore, it is important that those who carry the message, in such situations, have experience with, or are willing to learn, how to communicate the A.A. message using different media tools or platforms. Concerns about anonymity, for instance, may be quite different in digital communications than they are in person.

Resources to bring

Many of our pamphlets are designed to address specific audiences, such as medical professionals, faith leaders, elderly, youth, mental health professionals, etc. Utilizing the information from these pamphlets can aid your talk. Keep extra on hand and distribute them to the audience as requested and appropriate.

When to share part of your story

Those who have experience giving talks to non-alcoholics have learned that average persons want to know what Alcoholics Anonymous is, what it does, and what they can do to cooperate, rather than hearing personal stories.

On the other hand, experienced speakers have found that it is helpful to relate pertinent incidents from their own drinking histories to illustrate a point. Sharing your experience as a person who has had a problem with alcohol and has recovered with the help of A.A. can lend conviction to your talk. The decision on whether to tell some of your personal story will be influenced by the type of audience and the rapport you have developed with them.

Brief Outline for a Talk

Considerations before giving a talk

We are not experts in alcoholism.

We are not experts in any medical, psychological, or physiological field. Questions about alcoholism will inevitably be asked during these talks. As A.A. members we speak on Alcoholics Anonymous only and when answering these questions; we respectfully remind the audience of our amateur status. We must remember that we have no monopoly on recovery and that others have achieved sobriety using different methods. Our only aim is to be helpful so that the still sick and suffering alcoholic may find sobriety. “We should recognize that our experience to speak on alcoholism is limited in subject matter to Alcoholics Anonymous and its recovery program.”

Speak with your point of contact before the scheduled event to find out more information about the type of audience your group will be speaking to (e.g., employees of an organization, physicians, nurses, psychologists, and others).

Be prepared for your particular audience and your allotted time to speak. Some of our pamphlets are designed to target specific audiences and may be helpful to those assembled.

Remember to dress appropriately, arrive on time and refrain from using inappropriate language. Before leaving, thank the inviting persons for the opportunity to speak, and provide contact information for any questions that may arise afterward.

Introducing Ourselves

When speaking at non-A.A. meetings, we introduce ourselves by first name only. We cannot expect non-A.A.s to know or understand our

need for anonymity. Because of this, it is helpful to recite and/or distribute our anonymity statement.

What is Alcoholics Anonymous?

Familiar as we are with A.A., many outside the Fellowship do not know much about what we do. The simple and concise description of A.A. is described in the A.A. Preamble. Our Preamble, which is like a mission statement, answers many general questions. “Information on Alcoholics Anonymous” is also a useful flyer for answering such questions.

Typically, the next few questions are about what A.A. does and does not do.

How It Works (Steps)

“A.A.’s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.” (From *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 15)

Unity (Traditions)

“A.A.’s Twelve Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself. They outline the means by which A.A. maintains its unity and relates itself to the world about it, the way it lives and grows.” (From *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 15)

Open vs Closed Meetings

Closed: In support of A.A.’s singleness of purpose, attendance at closed meetings is limited to persons who have a desire to stop drinking. Anyone who thinks they might have a problem with alcohol is welcome to attend.

Open: These meetings are designed for nonalcoholics to better understand the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. While all are welcome, nonalcoholics are asked to attend as observers only and refrain from sharing.

Singleness of Purpose

The blue Primary Purpose Statement card (F-17) is a good resource.

Personal story (provided it is appropriate)

This may not be appropriate in all settings. Confirm with the organizer beforehand what would be most useful to their audience: information about A.A. in general, a personal story or a combination of both. If you do share part of your personal story, address:

- Your drinking pattern and experience
- Why you decided to seek help
- What you find in A.A. that helps you
- What life is like today as a result of working the Twelve Steps
- Share examples of A.A. at work in a community through literature, and by giving presentations, bringing A.A. meetings to hospitals, institutions, correctional facilities, and more.
- Encourage anyone interested in helping an alcoholic to speak with you afterward to discover how A.A. can cooperate to help the sick and suffering alcoholic.

Contacting A.A.: How we cooperate with other organizations

Be sure to leave information about how to contact A.A. and provide contact information for a local intergroup or central office, as well as www.aa.org. Bring cards, a local meeting schedule and inform them of the meeting guide app.

Frequently Asked Questions

How is A.A. funded?

Voluntary contributions that are accepted from members only are used to support groups and national and international A.A. services.

How does someone become a member of A.A.?

Simply by attending meetings of a local group. Newcomers may call a local A.A. office, write or email the General Service Office, or be guided to A.A. by a friend, a relative, or a professional. But the decision to join is up to the alcoholic alone. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking.

Does it cost money to attend?

No. Every bit of A.A. is supported through voluntary contributions of members and sales of our literature.

How did A.A. start?

In 1934 a New York stockbroker who sobered up realized that efforts to help other problem drinkers helped him to stay sober. On a business trip to Akron in 1935, he was put in touch with an alcoholic surgeon. When the doctor also recovered, the two sought out other alcoholics. The movement spread and acquired its name with the publication of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* in 1939.

How does it work?

A.A. works chiefly through local meetings, where alcoholics help one another to use the A.A. program of recovery, the Twelve Steps.

Why do you have open meetings if you're anonymous?

An open meeting is designed to allow nonalcoholics to see the inner workings of our meetings and program, and we ask them to respect the anonymity of those present.

How is A.A. organized?

Very informally. Groups elect officers to serve, not govern, for limited periods. Each group may elect a representative who takes part in area meetings and helps to elect an area delegate to the General Service Conference (U.S./Canada), the groups' link with the General Service Board of trustees. Conference members and trustees, too, serve the Fellowship but do not govern it.

Is it religious?

No. A.A. includes people of many faiths, as well as agnostics, athiests and non-believers.

What is the success rate of A.A.?

Alcoholics Anonymous is an informal society of more than 2,000,000 recovered alcoholics in the United States, Canada and other countries. These members have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. Because A.A. has never attempted to keep formal membership lists, it is extremely difficult for A.A.'s General Service Office (GSO) to obtain completely accurate figures on total membership at any given time. There are currently many translations of the basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Do A.A. members abstain from all alcohol?

A.A. members know that they themselves cannot handle alcohol safely, and so abstain from alcohol. However, A.A. has no opinion on outside issues, including others' use of alcohol.

What makes you an alcoholic?

"If when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking

you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic.” (From the chapter ‘We Agnostics’ in the Big Book). “Only you can decide whether you want to give A.A. a try — whether you think it can help you.” (From ‘Is A.A. For you?’)

How can a nonalcoholic help an alcoholic?

- Offer to help the sick alcoholic get in touch with A.A. (locally).
- Offer to attend an open A.A. meeting with the alcoholic.
- Explain that only the individual can know whether they are really alcoholic, but suggest that talking with someone from A.A. may help.
- Encourage a better understanding of A.A. through attending some open meetings and reading the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.
- Give the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* to the alcoholic.

If you are a loved one of an alcoholic, you might benefit from a local meeting of the Al-Anon Family Groups (al-anon.org). The Al-Anon Family Groups provide support to the families, friends and loved ones of people suffering from alcoholism.

Responsibilities of A.A. for Keeping People Informed

In 1956 the A.A. Conference approved the brief statement of A.A.'s Movement-Wide Public Information Policy, stated on page 9 of this pamphlet.

In 1960, in amplification of the statement, the board of trustees approved certain guidelines to be followed by the Public Information Committee in the release of information about A.A. to news sources. Among these principles, which may also be adapted to public speaking, are the following:

“The release must be factual; boasting, disparagement of other groups concerned with the problem of alcoholism, or engagement in controversy in any form, whether by direct representation or by implication, must be carefully avoided.

“We should recognize that our experience to speak about alcoholism is limited in subject matter to Alcoholics Anonymous and its recovery program; hence, any statement in reference to other or broader aspects of the problem of alcoholism should be accurately attributed to authoritative sources outside the movement, identified by name.”

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. 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 A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; 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 A.A. 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.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: www.aa.org

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
AS BILL SEES IT
OUR GREAT RESPONSIBILITY
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
'PASS IT ON'

BOOKLETS

LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE

PAMPHLETS

Experience, Strength and Hope:

WOMEN IN A.A.
BLACK IN A.A.
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN A.A.
YOUNG PEOPLE IN A.A.
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —
AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
HISPANIC WOMEN IN A.A.
BEHIND THE WALLS: A MESSAGE OF HOPE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for those in custody)

About A.A.:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER — MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US:
AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR TWELVE TRADITIONS
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION — HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
FAITH LEADERS ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

VIDEOS (available on www.aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM

For Professionals:

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly, www.aagrapevine.org)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish, www.aalavina.org)
ABOUT A.A. (digital-only, www.aa.org/about-aa)

A DECLARATION OF UNITY:

This we owe to A.A.'s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

I AM RESPONSIBLE...

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that:

I am responsible.

