

# A.A.<sup>®</sup> Guidelines

## Public Information

from G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in the various areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of Autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an *informed* group conscience.

### PURPOSE

Like all of A.A., the primary purpose of members involved with public information service is to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Working together, members of local Public Information committees convey A.A. information to the general public, including the media.

### HISTORY

The 1939 publication of our Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, was the first A.A. information available for the public. By 1941, several articles on A.A. in national publications helped to encourage understanding and acceptance of A.A. Also significant were good relations with professionals, such as Dr. W. D. Silkworth, Rev. Sam Shoemaker and Dr. Harry Tiebout.

In 1956, the Public Information Committee of the General Service Board was formed, with a corresponding Conference P.I. Committee established in 1961. The General Service Conference established this policy for A.A. Public Information:

*In all public relationships, A.A.'s sole objective is to help the still-suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making known to the 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 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.*

By 1973, the General Service Conference confirmed that "We must recognize that our competence to speak about alcoholism is limited in subject matter to *Alcoholics Anonymous* and its recovery program."

### COOPERATION WITH THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Responding to an expressed need, the Conference recommended formation of a separate Conference Committee in 1971. Now known as the Cooperation with the Professional Community Committee (C.P.C.), its purpose is to better distribute A.A. information to those in contact with alcoholics through their professions. In some locales, C.P.C. and P.I. committees are separate; elsewhere they function as one committee covering two services.

It is clearly understood that both of these committees work within our primary purpose and are not in competition.

### LOCAL P.I. COMMITTEES

Whether sponsored by an area assembly, district, or A.A. central office (intergroup), P.I. committees are responsible to the A.A. entity they serve.

**Getting Started:** P.I. chair listings can be updated by the area registrar or you can send your contact information directly to G.S.O. Once new chairs are listed, the General Service Office (G.S.O.) sends them a welcome letter along with basic P.I. information and places them on the Box 4-5-9 mailing list. A P.I. Workbook is sent to all new P.I. chairpersons. Others are asked to purchase them.

To get shared A.A. experience regarding P.I. service, contact with others in your area/region is helpful. There is also a staff person at G.S.O. who handles P.I. activities and maintains contact with local committees.

**Committee Members:** The first qualification for doing P.I., or any other service work, is sound sobriety. All committee members need to be thoroughly familiar with the A.A. program and able to provide consistent and accurate information about the Fellowship. Experience in public relations is not essential.

An understanding of the Twelve Traditions, including a firm grasp of the Anonymity Traditions, is most important. This is often enhanced through committees studying basic P.I. material together. Many local P.I. committees find it beneficial to review the P.I. Workbook at their initial meeting, familiarizing themselves with it before setting goals.

From one area P.I. committee: "After the assembly acted to establish a P.I. committee, a few interested members met together and realized that we needed participation from the districts and background from G.S.O. Individually, we purchased basic P.I. pamphlets and the P.I. Workbook through our local intergroup or G.S.O. The committee decided to meet monthly to read and discuss the pamphlets 'Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings' and 'Understanding Anonymity,' the service piece 'Information on Alcoholics Anonymous' and the P.I. Workbook.

"Our study meetings gained in enthusiasm as we read together from one basic P.I. pamphlet at a time. New members joined, and before long we each began to enjoy taking part in 'practice talks' during our monthly meetings.

"A 'practice talk' session was led by a committee person who had prepared a presentation, asking us to 'pretend' to be a certain audience (high school students, church or business group, etc.). After the talk, the 'audience' would ask questions suitable to the supposed group. We concluded by offering loving suggestions for improvement or clarification.

"After six months, we informed the local community of our availability. The next year, we were able to visit 20 schools, sharing A.A. information with more than 7,300 people."

In locations with sparse populations and small number of A.A.s involved in P.I. service, the need to regularly share experience and information is just as vital, and may be conducted by phone or mail. P.I. committee meetings are less frequent, but the purpose, need for guidance and link to an A.A. service entity remains the same.

*Box 4-5-9:* P.I. committees can benefit by the shared P.I. experience through articles in G.S.O.'s bimonthly newsletter. Collected A.A. service experience in carrying the message is valuable to the Fellowship, and G.S.O. welcomes the opportunity to receive sharing on local activities and projects from local P.I. committees so that it might be shared with others.

**Financing:** Most often the cost of doing P.I. service work is met from group contributions to whatever body forms the committee — general service area, district, central office/intergroup or, in smaller communities, one or more A.A. groups.

Usually, funds for the committee's work will be included in the budget of the A.A. entity served, and P.I. expenses are regularly reported. Occasionally, there is consideration of a special allocation for P.I. projects, such as distributing Big Books to local libraries.

## BASIC COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

What follows are the essential services, which may be altered or amplified by the group conscience of the P.I. committee or the A.A. entity supporting the P.I. work.

**P.I. Visits:** Some examples of visits might include schools, local businesses, church and civic groups. Where no C.P.C. committee exists, P.I. committees might also be in contact with professionals such as the clergy, health care providers, lawyers and teachers. In advance of initial contacts, P.I. committees often distribute a simple letter describing their availability and how interested persons can make contact for more information. They might also plan a visit by two or more committee members.

A P.I. visit might include distribution of A.A. literature, a brief talk and/or showing an A.A. video. It is essential that participating A.A.s agree on the basic outline for the visit, and are familiar with the details in "Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings" and "Understanding Anonymity."

A few points to remember:

- Open by describing the need for personal anonymity at the public level; give your first name and A.A. membership.
- Avoid drunkalogs, keep your A.A. story general and brief. Use humor with good taste; what's funny to A.A.s may not be laughable to nonmembers.
- Confine your comments to A.A. information; remember that we're not experts when speaking as A.A. members. We don't try to speak for A.A. as a whole.
- As nonprofessionals, we do not give any information concerning the general subject of alcoholism, including on treatment, medication, prevention, advocacy and legislation.
- If appropriate, offer A.A. literature, such as "A.A. at a Glance," "A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous" or the A.A. Membership Survey pamphlet. Include information on local open A.A. meetings.
- Be on time. Dress simply and neatly. First impressions are important.

**Public Meetings and Luncheons:** Some P.I. committees host informational meetings that are open to the public. Careful advance planning is important to assure a successful outcome.

The gratitude luncheon is another way of thanking non-A.A.s who have given a P.I. committee an opportunity to carry the message. Committees have also invited public representatives to a special luncheon as a means of introducing them to Alcoholics Anonymous. Brief talks may be given, but the atmosphere is kept informal. For both these and the gratitude luncheons, it has been suggested, the seating arrangement should alternate hosts and guests, to give the latter a chance to meet some live examples of recovery in A.A.

**Staffing an A.A. Booth:** Many P.I. committees are active in staffing "A.A. booths" at health fairs in the communities they serve. The invitation to participate may come directly to the local P.I. committee or through the G.S.O. staff person on the P.I. desk. The local P.I. committee ascertains if taking part serves A.A.'s primary purpose. The invitation is acknowledged with appreciation whether or not the invitation can be accepted.

Many times a simple table is provided by the organization hosting the function, and two or more committee members staff the booth. P.I. committees rotate this responsibility to assure that all have an opportunity to participate.

A.A. literature specifically for the public is set out on the table and offered to interested passersby, along with "P.I. mailing labels" from G.S.O. for those wishing more information. Soon after the event, completed mailing labels are sent to G.S.O., which sends information packets to each.

G.S.O. can help by sharing experience and by furnishing basic literature to the committee undertaking this service ("A.A. at a Glance," "A Message to Teenagers," the most recent A.A. Membership Survey pamphlet or display, "A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous," etc.). It is vital that requests for special-event literature be received by G.S.O. in ample time to allow for packing and shipping — usually three weeks notice is sufficient.

## COOPERATING WITH THE MEDIA

A.A. has enjoyed excellent relations with print, radio and television journalists.

**Anonymity:** By Conference Advisory Action, G.S.O. annually sends several thousand Anonymity letters requesting that those working in print, radio and TV journalism observe our Tradition of personal anonymity at the public level for all A.A. members. Some P.I. committees distribute copies of this Anonymity letter locally, while others use the text on their letterhead for a mailing to local media outlets.

**Information on Local Events:** Upon request, some P.I. committees assist by distributing information about upcoming A.A. conventions or Regional Forums to community and local newspapers.

**For Small Communities and Foreign Language Papers or Publications:** P.I. committees may request that A.A. information be included in the public service page or community bulletin board. The committee offers a simple description of whom A.A. serves and how to obtain more information locally.

**Public Service Announcements (P.S.A.s):** Whether for radio or television, A.A. Conference-approved P.S.A.s are widely accepted as a way to provide information on A.A.

Historically, local radio and television stations have offered free airtime for public service announcements from nonprofit organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Although stations are no longer mandated to donate airtime to P.S.A.s, local broadcasters are generally quite willing to air them.

In most locations, you can reach out to the radio station's public service director who often handles P.S.A.s. Many times, P.I. committees find that a personal visit to deliver the P.S.A. often results in an opportunity to share A.A. information, emphasizing the principles of anonymity and nonaffiliation. It is always helpful to request that the station lead into an A.A. radio or TV P.S.A. with a statement such as "Here is a public service announcement from Alcoholics Anonymous."

If you would like more information about working with radio or television stations, please write or call G.S.O. and ask for the service piece "Suggestions for Working with Your Local Radio and Television Stations to Help Carry the Message."

**A.A. Videos:** Conference-approved videos are listed in the literature catalog and serve as an excellent way of telling the A.A. story visually. Occasionally, a TV station is willing to air information on A.A. in more detail than can be included on P.S.A.s. "Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous" is suitable for this purpose, as are the "Young People's Videos." Keep in mind that no A.A. video or P.S.A. can be altered without the permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.

**Requests for A.A. Presence on Radio or TV:** Such requests are carefully considered to assure that: a.) Anonymity of members will be protected; b.) A.A. cooperation will adhere to our primary purpose and Traditions.

Two suggestions seem to be essential for a good outcome: 1) Discuss the request with other A.A.s involved in service, seeking input from a wider group conscience beyond the P.I. committee; and 2) If the decision is to proceed with A.A. participation, use members with good experience in discussing our program with the public.

The 1969 General Service Conference considered this matter and approved this resolution:

"We will endeavor to avoid participation on radio and TV programs, unless:

- a. We are given adequate time for preparation;
- b. Our presence will serve an A.A. objective;
- c. The primary discussion is appropriate for A.A. — not concerned with crime, sex, controversy or any other sensationalism;
- d. We are satisfied that our anonymity is guaranteed."

## LITERATURE AND ONLINE RESOURCES

The Conference-approved Literature and Other A.A. Material catalog has information on P.I. (and C.P.C.) specific items, including the P.I. Workbook and pamphlets mentioned in these Guidelines.

The aa.org website provides resources for local committees on the "Public Information Committees" page. Committees may also wish to refer media professionals to the online Press/Media page on aa.org.

Additionally, G.S.O. has P.I. Discount Packages for sale to help P.I. committees with quantity purchases of basic A.A. information for the public.

Displays of A.A. literature are often placed in public areas in cooper-

ation with the responsible officials. Such displays might be placed in libraries, schools, bookmobiles, church literature racks and hospital reading rooms or carts. An example of how this works is where a P.I. committee cooperated with the local library system to determine a suitable location in each branch, along with a system for replenishment. The result was a small, attractive A.A. literature display with information on how to obtain local A.A. meeting information.

Some literature for P.I. committees is listed below, and Discount Package Information is contained in the P.I. Kit. For information about Discount Packages, please contact G.S.O., Grand Central Station, P.O. Box 459, New York, N.Y. 10163, or call (212) 870-3400.

## BASIC P.I. LITERATURE (Available in print and online)

### For Committees:

Public Information Workbook

A.A. Guidelines (on) Public Information

A.A. Guidelines (on) Internet

"Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings"

"Understanding Anonymity"

"A Member's-Eye View of Alcoholics Anonymous"

"A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous"

A.A. Fact File

A.A. Fact Sheet

Anonymity Statement for Public Meetings

Anonymity Wallet Cards

Box 4-5-9

Anonymity Online (service material)

Frequently Asked Questions about A.A. Web Sites (service material)

### For the Public:

"A.A. at a Glance"

Information on Alcoholics Anonymous

"A Message to Teenagers"

"Alcoholics Anonymous Membership Survey"

"Problems Other than Alcohol"

A.A. Preamble placard

A.A. Membership Survey display (easel back)

"A.A. in Your Community"

"Members of the Clergy Ask About Alcoholics Anonymous"

"If You Are a Professional, A.A. Wants to Work with You"

"Is There a Problem Drinker in the Workplace?"

"Is There an Alcoholic in Your Life?"

## CARDS AND SIGNS

These are often used to offer the telephone number of the nearest central office, groups, or A.A. contact (depending upon the size of the community), or to give the times and places of nearby meetings. Cards and signs have been placed in telephone offices, police stations, sheriffs' offices, hospitals, county infirmaries, hotels, and taxi stations. Signs may be in the form of car cards (in buses or subway trains) or of road signs or billboards (those that welcome the traveler to "our town" by listing local lodges and civic clubs).

## TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES & WEBSITES

Sometimes, it is the local P.I. committee that is responsible for the A.A. listing in the phone book (including the Yellow Pages). Many

local A.A. entities have created their own A.A. websites to offer information on local meetings and events. Often the P.I. committee is responsible for the maintenance of these websites.

## PI. COMMITTEE SHARING

As part of P.I. shared experience, the following is a list of goals from a district P.I. committee:

1. Be sure every public library has at least one Conference-approved book, e.g. the *Big Book*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* or *Living Sober*.
2. Let the Fellowship know how to reach out to the hearing impaired or blind.
3. Place a literature rack in every high school, college, police station, library and hospital in the district and keep the rack stacked with appropriate literature and meeting schedules.
4. Send a letter to high schools, offering A.A. literature and/or a presentation on A.A. — what we do and what we do not do.
5. Send a letter to convalescent homes, rest homes and senior centers in the district offering A.A. literature and/or a presentation on A.A.
6. List open A.A. meetings in the newspapers in the district.
7. Place a small (paid if necessary) announcement in every district newspaper around the holidays.
8. Work with the newspapers — generating interest in our Fellowship.
9. Respond to speaking requests at non-A.A. meetings in the district.
10. Place Public Service Announcements with radio and television stations.
11. Put meeting schedules behind the front desks at every hotel, motel and bed and breakfast.
12. Participate in district and state A.A. seminars and conventions.
13. Fight apathy within the Fellowship, find a co-chair and interested people in order to achieve all the above, and most importantly, keep your sanity and stay away from the first drink.

## INFORMING THE FELLOWSHIP

Though the “public” in “public information” refers to non-A.A.s, many local P.I. committees consider that helping to keep the Fellowship itself informed is also among their responsibilities.

Building wider understanding of the Twelve Traditions among A.A.s, especially as they pertain to online social networking sites,

is a common P.I. activity; special meetings are often held for this purpose. Committees everywhere have been successful in explaining the P.I. applications of Tradition Eleven. The A.A. Guideline on the Internet and the service piece “Anonymity Online” are helpful resources.

Many P.I. committees provide local members with reports on all P.I. activities in the area. This is an excellent way to enlist the cooperation of local groups in planned projects. Information is disseminated through:

- A regular P.I. newsletter or a P.I. section in a local A.A. bulletin, including list of all completed P.I. projects in a given year. For instance, the types of outside groups that requested P.I. speakers may be shown.
- Visiting local groups to give brief talks about Public Information service.
- Setting up P.I. workshops at assemblies, conventions, conferences, and other A.A. get-togethers.
- Inviting members of local A.A. groups to attend a special meeting on P.I.
- Informing local groups when a TV or radio program produced with the cooperation of the P.I. committee is about to be aired.

## G.S.O.’s A.A. WEBSITE

G.S.O.’s A.A. website, [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org), is available in English, French and Spanish. In addition to available online resources already described, here are more items on the website that may be helpful to local P.I. efforts:

- A.A. Conference-approved pamphlets “Is A.A. for You?,” “A Newcomer Asks...,” “A Message to Teenagers...”
- Contact information for Central Offices/Intergroups/Answering Services in the U.S. and Canada
- Contact information for international general service offices
- Anonymity letter to media
- About A.A., newsletter for professionals
- Resource page for professionals

G.S.O.’s A.A. website has been successful as a P.I. tool. We have received positive comments from media professionals, librarians and students who are interested in Alcoholics Anonymous. We invite you to visit this website and provide information about it in your P.I. presentations.