A.A.® Guidelines

Cooperating with Court, D.W.I. and Similar Programs

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A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service 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.

WHEN AND WHY A.A. BEGAN COOPERATING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

In 1942, members from San Francisco brought the first A.A. meeting into San Quentin Prison at the request of Warden Clinton T. Duffy. This example led to A.A.'s cooperation with court systems, including direct communications with judges and parole and probation officials. The sole purpose of this Twelfth Step work, then and now, was to carry A.A.'s message to the still-suffering alcoholic. To fulfill that purpose, A.A.s have learned how to share A.A. information within court systems.

Probation and parole officers, as well as judges, often require people involved in alcohol-related offenses to attend A.A. meetings. Some A.A. members find it difficult to accept this "outside" policy in light of our Third Tradition, "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking." Perhaps it's helpful to remember that our Traditions apply to us, and aren't affected by the regulations established by outside institutions—we cooperate without affiliating. By adhering to all Twelve Traditions, many groups welcome each newcomer regardless of how they got to the meeting.

In recent years, a larger number of "safe driving" programs have been set up for drivers in trouble with the law because of some episode related to drinking. These programs have many different names—such as Alcohol Safety Action Project (A.S.A.P.), Driving While Intoxicated (D.W.I.), Driving Under the Influence (D.U.I.), and the like. Many A.A. committees that cooperate with these programs offer attendees a chance to learn about A.A., and some are now members of A.A. as a result.

From Page 89 of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous:* "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.... You can help when no one else can.... because of your own drinking experience you can be uniquely useful to other alcoholics. So cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim."

Therefore, as long as carrying the message helps those of us already in A.A. maintain our own sobriety, this kind of message-carrying is a success. Our responsibility is to make the seed of A.A. freely available. What the sufferer does with it is not our responsibility. Only one "statistic" interests us in A.A.—the next person who may need our help.

WHAT BASIC ELEMENTS ARE COMMON TO ALL SUCH NON-A.A. PROGRAMS?

In most cases, this general outline is followed by all court programs for "alcoholic" offenders:

- *Pretrial interview*
- *Release, conviction, or case continued (if conviction, sentence or probation comes next)*
- *Court classes on alcoholism, regular (outside the court) A.A. meetings, or incarceration*

The offender under suspended sentence or on probation may be required by the judge to attend meetings of one type or another.

The court class (sometimes called an honor court meeting) usually meets in the court building, and may be one of three types:

1. Meetings *about* A.A., usually run by A.A. members, though sometimes an officer of the court presides.

2. Meetings handled by several agencies, with a doctor explaining alcoholism, and other professionals and/or volunteers talking about alcoholism. Usually, at least one session is turned over to A.A. members, who put on a "sample" A.A. meeting. They tell briefly their own stories, and also tell how A.A. works. A.A. members experienced at this say it is important to avoid criticizing anything. These classes seem to work best when A.A. speakers emphasize the benefits of sobriety and the A.A. way of life.

3. Meetings sponsored by domestic relations or family courts, which may include sample Al-Anon and Alateen meetings held for the spouse and children of the offender. These are separate from the A.A. meetings, of course.

It is important to explain the difference between these court classes and regular (outside) A.A. meetings, and to have A.A. literature on hand at each session.

Meetings Outside the Court

Sometimes meetings become so big that they lead to the formation of new, "outside" groups—regular A.A. groups which meet away from the court building and choose a new name with no relation to the court.

When some judges require offenders to attend regular A.A. meetings, as a condition of the suspended sentence or probation, they may be legally required to have each offender offer proof that he or she attended the required number of meetings.

WHICH A.A. TRADITIONS GUIDE US IN COOPERATING WITH THESE PROGRAMS?

All of them, but these have been specially mentioned:

One—Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

Two—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.

Three—The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

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

Six—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.

Ten—Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Eleven—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.

Twelve—Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON PROBLEMS AND HOW ARE THEY SOLVED?

A. *Getting A.A. members involved.*

Many A.A. members are not aware that this kind of Twelfth Step work is available and that they can participate in it.

In some locales, this service is coordinated by the Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.). Often ongoing Twelfth Step work within the court system leads to a subcommittee connected to the district or central office/intergroup. It's important to include enough A.A. members to cover A.A. commitments in the court system without detracting from other service work.

Usually, it is up to members of these committees to share this experience with other A.A.s, so that more A.A.s understand how to take part in this kind of Twelfth Step work. (See Which A.A. Members are Best Suited… p.3)

B. *Misunderstanding of these programs by A.A.s, and by the offenders.*

Some A.A. members are upset when they hear about this Twelfth Step service. For instance:

1. When such a program first starts, a small A.A. group may have more newcomers than regular members at its meetings. Some members feel their group is being "invaded."

This can usually be solved by setting up a meeting with the judge and members of several nearby groups, asking the judge to spread the newcomers around among several "open" meetings.

One option, when many newcomers under court order turn up at a meeting, is for the members to divide into small discussion groups, with a few regulars sitting with each set of newcomers.

In any case, it is probably a good idea for the judge to refer people to "open" A.A. meetings, in the event that some of those referred do not believe themselves to be alcoholics. Often, providing the court with a list of "open" meetings will avoid referrals to "closed" meetings.

2. Some members have the mistaken impression that such programs "affiliate" A.A. with outside enterprises, or constitute "endorsement" by A.A. of a court or D.W.I. program. However, A.A.'s cooperation with these programs no more constitutes "affiliation" or "endorsement" than do A.A. meetings held in hospitals and prisons.

A.A. members involved in court classes, or meetings about A.A., explain that these are not regular A.A. meetings. It is pointed out that A.A. is self-supporting, so A.A. groups do not accept rent-free meeting rooms or literature furnished by any non-A.A. source, and are totally independent of a court or other enterprise. It is shown that A.A. groups do not force attendance, or keep attendance records. Courts can do these things as they are not bound by the A.A. Traditions.

C. *Mandatory attendance at A.A. meetings.*

All of us sober in A.A. know that to get well we really had to want it for ourselves—eventually, if not at first. We could not stay sober just because we were "required" to, or for anybody else.

Yet, in a real sense, every A.A. member is at first "sentenced" to A.A., either by their employer, family, friends, doctor, or by their own inner suffering. In A.A., we are not concerned about who or what first sends the alcoholic to us. Our responsibility is to show A.A. as a way of life, so that all newcomers who need it might want it.

D. *The hostile attitude of some who are required by a law enforcement agency to attend A.A. meetings.*

Some of these newcomers originally approach A.A. very resentful at having to be there. This is easy to understand. It is up to us to be patient and tolerant toward the newcomer.

When sending offenders to A.A., one judge tells them about the Fellowship and hands each one a small card showing information about meetings, plus suggestions for behavior at A.A. meetings including being on time, staying for the entire meeting, not being disruptive, etc. When a judge is willing to do this, it helps to prevent offenders arriving late, interrupting to demand signed attendance cards, and otherwise disturbing the meeting.

E. *Proof of attendance at A.A. meetings.*

It is important for the judge to understand that attendance at A.A. meetings does not guarantee anybody's future sobriety. Nevertheless, some judges require legal, written proof that offenders have attended a certain number of meetings. Often, when the court-ordered newcomer attends an A.A. meeting, the group secretary (or other group officer) is happy to sign their first name, or to initial a slip furnished by the court saying so-and-so was at the meeting on a particular date.

All involved recognize that neither the group nor the members are "bound" in any way by the signature, nor does this courtesy signify affiliation of the group with any other program. It simply illustrates cooperation.

In some areas, courts furnish cooperating A.A. groups with sealed, stamped envelopes addressed to the court. In general, the secretary of the group announces that anybody needing an envelope may get it after the meeting. The newcomer takes the envelope, privately writes his or her name and/or return address on it, and mails it.

In other areas, each cooperating group has a sheet, furnished by the court, that the secretary announces is available for court-ordered newcomers to sign after the meeting. The secretary mails the sheet (in envelopes furnished by the referring agency) to the office sending prospects to A.A. Thus it is not the A.A.

group, but the prospect's own signature which affirms he or she was at the meeting.

It is important to note that an Advisory Action of the 1983 Conference Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community states "A.A. does not provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials, social agencies, employers, etc."

F. *Offers by an agency to pay A.A. members for taking prospects to and from A.A. meetings.*

It is important for A.A. members to explain to the agency officials and judges that A.A. is strictly self-supporting (see Tradition Seven) and that A.A. members do not accept money for Twelfth (or any other) Step work (see Tradition Eight, on nonprofessionalism). We work with other alcoholics for our own sobriety, not for money. It is our responsibility to make this clear to court-ordered newcomers, too.

As A.A. members, we are not qualified to judge, endorse or oppose any other program in the field of alcoholism, nor is it a good idea to give the impression that we are professional, scientific experts. We can help only with our own experience.

(Note: A.A. members who are hired to work as professionals in the field of alcoholism are, of course, a different matter, since they are paid for professional services. Even so, they are not paid to do Twelfth Step work.)

WHICH A.A. MEMBERS ARE BEST SUITED FOR COOPERATION WITH SUCH PROGRAMS?

Any A.A. member may join with other A.A.s in this valuable asset to service. It seems that those who have been most successful at it are A.A. members who:

— have several years' continuous sobriety, serenity and steadfastness, mixed with a clear grasp of the purpose of Twelfth Step work;

—have had wide A.A. experience, not only in more than one group, but also in central office (intergroup) and general service affairs;

— have an understanding of A.A. experience recorded in the Big Book, *A.A. Comes of Age, Twelve* Steps *and Twelve Traditions,* and other A.A. publications.

HOW CAN YOU HELP START A PROGRAM IF NONE EXISTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

You've already made a good start by familiarizing yourself with this material. Follow that up by finding out whether any other A.A.s in your community are interested in and knowledgeable about such programs.

See whether your local central office or area general service committee knows where such help is needed.

Talk it over with other A.A.s, and meet with some groups in the community to inform them of your plans, and to see which groups would be willing to cooperate, and in which ways. (Be patient—not all members may be interested in this work; their feelings need to be respected, as yours are.)

Once you have a nucleus of A.A.s, two or three of you might visit with a local court official. Take along A.A. information, such as the pamphlets "If You Are a Professional" and "A Brief Guide to A.A.," along with "A.A. as a Resource for Drug & Alcohol Court Professionals," and offer to take the court administrators to an "open" A.A. meeting.

If you have a computer with Internet access, you may also want to show the court personnel G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site (www.aa.org) during your visit. The website has the short informational video for court and legal professionals, as well as many other resources for professionals to learn about A.A. and information they may wish to share with newcomers.

Relax. If this is the right time, the program will happen. If it doesn't, wait for a more appropriate opportunity.

Pamphlets

"How A.A. Members Cooperate With Professionals"

"A.A. Tradition—How It Developed"

"The Twelve Traditions Illustrated"

"A.A. In Correctional Facilities"

"If You Are a Professional..."

"A.A. Membership Survey"

"Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings"

"A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous"

"Let's Be Friendly With Our Friends"

"It Sure Beats Sifting in a Cell"

"Is There an Alcoholic in the Workplace?"

"A.A. in Your Community"

"Members of the Clergy Ask About Alcoholics Anonymous"

Service Material and Guidelines

A.A. Fact File

Information on Alcoholics Anonymous

Sharing Experience on Coping With Influx of New Members

Guidelines (on) Cooperation With the Professional Community

A.A. as a Resource for Drug & Alcohol Court Professionals

Videos

Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous

It Sure Beats Sifting in a Cell

A.A. in Correctional Facilities

Carrying the Message Behind These Walls

A.A. Videos for Young People

Available at www.aa.org: "A.A. Cooperation with the Professional Community" videos directed to H.R., E.A.P., Legal, Correctional and Healthcare Professionals.

Newsletter

About A.A.