

A.A.® Guidelines

Internet

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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.

INTRODUCTION

In November of 1960, the AA Grapevine published an article by Bill W., titled “Freedom Under God: the Choice Is Ours”. Bill reflected on Tradition 11 and the potential hangups of the unusual public relations policy of A.A. that is based on anonymity at the public level. He writes:

“A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. Granting all its huge public benefits, this limitless world forum is nevertheless a hunting ground for all those who would seek money, acclaim and power at the expense of society in general. Here the forces of good and evil are locked in struggle. All that is shoddy and destructive contests all that is best.

Therefore nothing can matter more to the future welfare of AA than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication. Used unselfishly and well, the results can surpass our present imagination. Should we handle this great instrument badly, we shall be shattered by the ego demands of our own people — often with the best of intention on their part. Against all this, the sacrificial spirit of AA’s anonymity at the top public level is literally our shield and our buckler. Here again we must be confident that love of AA, and of God, will always carry the day.”

Since then, A.A. has continued to grow and carry its message through an ever-evolving communications network. To meet this need, the accurate and practical application of the A.A. principles is as important as ever.

A.A. PRINCIPLES AND THE INTERNET

Recovery

Based on A.A.’s strength and history of personal and intimate sharing, the spiritual nature of “one drunk talking to another” is an important consideration for the use of technology as a source of A.A. information. Even A.A. members that are comfortable with using internet and other platforms say that they do not want the ease of new technology to detract from the one-on-one sharing that has been so essential to our Fellowship and our recovery from alcoholism. It is helpful to remember that there is no need to let the speed of technology dictate the speed of our actions. Based on shared experience to date, website committees not only discuss the technical aspects of developing a website but also address questions related to preserving the spiritual connection created by one alcoholic talking with another. Some committees have reported a loss of “personal touch” when relying too heavily on technology, while others report that they have found a balance that works

for them. It will be up to the committee’s informed group conscience to determine what A.A. content is useful and appropriate. The good news is that today’s decisions can be reviewed, revised, abandoned or expanded. A committee can always try something for a certain length of time and then come back and determine how well it is working.

Unity

Self-support — In keeping with our Seventh Tradition, A.A. pays its own expenses and this also applies in cyberspace. To avoid confusion and to guard against the perception of affiliation, endorsement or promotion, care should be taken in selection of the website host. Website committees have avoided any host site that requires the inclusion of mandatory advertising space or links to commercial sites.

Many “free” webhosting services require that the website include mandatory advertisements or links. Most A.A. website committees see this as actual or implied affiliation or endorsement of the products or services listed in those ads. They have found it prudent to create a website through a service that does not include mandatory advertisements or links.

As part of the work that is made possible thanks to 7th Tradition contributions, the General Service Office, working closely with committees of A.A.’s General Service Board and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada), has broad responsibilities to its member groups, which include operating and maintaining the General Service Office A.A. website, aa.org.

Similarly, at the local level, an intergroup or central office is often established to carry out certain functions that serve the needs of local groups and meetings. It is usually maintained, supervised, and supported by these groups in their general interest, and exists to aid the groups with their common purpose of carrying the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Many intergroups and central offices provide online chat services, offer digital A.A. materials in the languages of their communities, and use an ADA Accessible website format. When adding materials from aa.org to local websites be sure to use the weblinks instead of downloading PDFs. This will ensure the most recent versions of these materials. Additional information can be found through the [Guidelines on Intergroups and Central Offices](#).

Nonaffiliation, nonendorsement — Linking to other A.A. websites will often have the positive effect of significantly broadening the scope of a site. However, even when linking to another A.A. site, care must be exercised since each A.A. entity is autonomous, has its own group conscience, and may display information that another A.A. group

conscience might find objectionable. There is no way to know when this might occur.

Experience indicates that linking to non-A.A. sites is even more problematic. Not only are they much more likely to display non-A.A. and/or controversial material, but linking might imply endorsement, if not affiliation. In the final analysis, experience strongly suggests that, when considering linking to another site, proceed with caution.

GSO has attempted to avoid some of these pitfalls on GSO's A.A. website, aa.org, by confining its links to known A.A. service entities and by incorporating a mandatory exit statement when someone wishes to activate the outside links on the site. (This statement also covers access to application software such as Adobe Reader, which is provided to assist visitors in reading Portable Document Format (PDF) files.)

Attraction rather than promotion — As our co-founder, Bill W., wrote: “Public information takes many forms — the simple sign outside a meeting place that says ‘A.A. meeting tonight’; listing in local phone directories; distribution of A.A. literature; and radio and television shows using sophisticated media techniques. Whatever the form, it comes down to ‘one drunk carrying the message to another drunk,’ whether through personal contact or through the use of third parties and the media.”

Simply put, at the end of the day we want people who need and want A.A. to find us. Clear and accessible presentations of local meeting listings and events go a long way to making it as easy as possible for anyone looking to A.A., either for their own sobriety, or as a professional or family member, to be able to find A.A. members to connect to. Public Information efforts ensure that A.A. is present in public discourse, and often times generate traffic to local websites and media platforms that are maintained by A.A. members to carry the A.A. message.

Safety — For safety purposes, some online or hybrid groups have provided helpful reminders that taking pictures or screen shots, and/or posting on social media in a way that compromises A.A. members' privacy and consent, are not in keeping with the anonymity principles of Traditions Eleven and Twelve.

To help keep meetings free from harassment, some online groups have created safety-related service positions. Online A.A. groups that have experienced harassment have adjusted the group's security settings, created safety procedures and/or sought professional technical support. Some local districts, areas, and forums, as well as intergroup/central offices, have developed tech support and safety service material to share with members. Additional information can be found through the [Guidelines on Safety & A.A. Groups](#).

Anonymity— As anonymity is the “spiritual foundation of all our Traditions,” we observe anonymity on public websites at all times. In 2013, the 63rd General Service Conference affirmed that “the internet, social media, and all forms of public communications are implicit in the last phrase of the short form of Tradition Eleven, which reads: ‘...at the level of press, radio, and films.’”

As Bill W. wrote: “At this altitude [public], anonymity — 100 percent anonymity — was the only possible answer. Here, principles would have to come before personalities without exception.” In 1970, the

General Service Conference passed an Advisory Action to create a “brief statement...no longer than the A.A. Preamble, explaining why A.A. retains the Tradition of Anonymity at the media-film level.” The following year, the statement was approved and became what is currently the “Anonymity Card” that closed groups will often read at the beginning of A.A. meetings, whether in person or online:

“There may be some here who are not familiar with our Tradition of personal anonymity at the public level: ‘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.’ We respectfully ask that A.A. speakers and A.A. members not be photographed, videoed, or identified by full name on all media platforms or in any published reports of our meetings, including those reports on public media platforms. The assurance of anonymity is essential in our efforts to help other problem drinkers who may wish to share our recovery program with us. And our Tradition of anonymity reminds us that A.A. principles come before personalities.”

The card is available on the A.A. online store as the [“Anonymity Statement Card.”](#) In simplest form, this means that A.A.s do not publicly identify themselves as A.A. members using their full names and/or full-face photos. Additional information can be found through the service piece, [“Guarding Anonymity Online”](#).

Service

As we continue to receive shared experience from our U.S./Canada service structure, we will include relevant shared experience. If you would like to submit shared experience on Online Service, please email groupservices@aa.org.

OTHER DIGITAL TOOLS

Social Media Platforms, Podcasts, Video/Audio

Social networking platforms and digital resources are public in nature. The platforms in and of themselves do not infringe on our principles of anonymity or any other Traditions. It is the actions of the individual that may cause harm to themselves, to others, or to A.A. as a whole.

For that we are, each of us, individually responsible to our fellowship, to ourselves and to our personal higher powers. Using these platforms to provide information about anonymity online may actually strengthen the principle of anonymity at the public level.

Individual members can take clear steps to safeguard their own anonymity. For example, an individual or group might create an entirely anonymous social media account without use of their full name or face and for sharing about recovery only. Others may choose to use their names but not photographs of themselves. Both the letter and the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition are clear guideposts for our fellowship in this respect.

As long as individuals do not identify themselves as A.A. members, there is no conflict of interest. However, someone identifying themselves as an A.A. member using their full name and/or a likeness, such as a full-face photograph, would be contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition, which states in the Long Form that, “...our [last] names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed.”

Experience suggests that it is in keeping with the Eleventh Tradition to

not disclose A.A. membership on social networking sites as well as on any other website, blog, podcast, etc., unless composed solely of A.A. members and password protected.

When it comes to the Twelfth Tradition this has proven to be something that only the individual can answer because of its foundation in humility. The following questions have proven useful tools for evaluating if our actions may or may not be in conflict with the principle described in Tradition Twelve.

- Is my posting about the message or the messenger?
- Am I carrying the A.A. message in the hopes of helping someone else, or simply “shouting from the rooftops”?
- Do my other posts and activities online create the appearance of A.A. affiliation or endorsement with outside issues?
- Am I being extra cautious about not identifying other members as A.A. members in photographs or statements?
- Am I avoiding the temptation to incite controversy with caustic arguments or bully others who disagree with me?
- Am I providing helpful links to my local A.A. website, aa.org, aagrapevine.org or aalavina.org?

Social networking sites may provide full names and pictures of group members, contrary to A.A.’s practice of avoiding such disclosures in public media. Even “closed” or “private” groups might still reveal an individual’s identity. Being well-informed prior to joining or starting such a group is the key to protecting your own anonymity, and that of others.

Websites

Websites and social networking offer individuals the chance to post a great deal of personal information about themselves (and others). Our experience suggests that some A.A. members do not post anything that is “A.A. jargon” on their personal profiles and in “status updates,” while others feel it is alright to do so as long as A.A. or Alcoholics Anonymous is not mentioned.

These websites often allow users to create social networking “groups” and the ability to invite others to “events” for like-minded individuals. Some A.A.s have chosen to create A.A.-related groups. Since this is an evolving medium, A.A. members are frequently “learning as they go,” as technology and applications change practically on a daily basis.

Resources for A.A. Entities — A.A. meetings, groups, and service entities are welcome to use all available digital material to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Literature available for free on aa.org is not intended to replace the function of obtaining your own copy of the Big Book; rather, in keeping with A.A.’s time-honored traditions, it is intended to make the hand of A.A. accessible to anyone, anywhere.

Some online meetings have asked whether they can share excerpts of literature in their meeting chat or screen sharing. The A.A. Service Manual in the section “Area Newsletter or Bulletins” provides guidance to A.A. entities regarding the reprinting of Alcoholics Anonymous copyrighted material. The section states:

Local A.A. publications are permitted to reprint the Steps, Traditions, and/or the Concepts, and to quote a phrase, sentence or brief paragraph excerpted from A.A. literature such as the Big Book, Alcoholics

Anonymous, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, The A.A. Service Manual and Conference-approved pamphlets without a prior, written request to do so. (The A.A. Service Manual 2021-2023, page 22).

When this occurs, the proper credit line should be included to ensure that the copyrights of A.A. literature are protected. After a quotation from a book or pamphlet, the credit line should read:

Reprinted from (name of publication, page number), with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.

Groups can include that credit line after any quote shared in the chat. For any questions on licensing and copyright questions, please contact the IP Policy Department at ip@aa.org.

Non-A.A. Entities — The A.A. General Service Office has become aware that some non-A.A. entities are using the trademarked name “Alcoholics Anonymous” or “A.A.” on their websites, URLs or mobile apps. They are not affiliated with A.A. and provide services that are not within the scope of what A.A. does. A.A. has a long history of cooperating with other organizations that aim to help alcoholics. In fact, some alcoholics may first hear about A.A. in these types of facilities or by treatment professionals. However, A.A. is not affiliated with any treatment center, rehab, or hospital. We do not provide “treatment” or medical services.

Moreover, A.A. is not affiliated with any other organization or other 12-Step Fellowship. Even A.A. meetings that take place at treatment centers and rehabs are not affiliated with those facilities. Our hope is that the meetings are not being conducted by the professionals who work there. A.A. cooperates by bringing meetings to these facilities, when asked. It doesn’t cost anything to attend A.A. meetings. There are no contracts to sign. We won’t ask for a credit card, electronic payment, insurance information or personal information. Membership is voluntary. Though we may offer suggestions on attending meetings regularly, attendance is a personal decision. There are no membership lists or formal membership requirements. The only requirement is a desire to stop drinking. Individuals concerned with their drinking can just show up. Additional information can be found through the [Guidelines on Safety & A.A. Groups](#).

Accessible Tools — [Accessibility Resources](#) from A.A. World Services and AA Grapevine/La Viña are available to support those facing accessibility barriers. Many of the resources are free on aa.org or available to purchase on onlineliterature.aa.org. Please share broadly at your local meetings and events so that the “hand of A.A.” is there for any alcoholic reaching out for help.

The General Service Office provides these resources not as experts but as a guide to what this office has to offer those facing accessibility barriers. If you know of a resource you’d like added to this list, please email access@aa.org.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Should I be concerned about the anonymity of others who view my sites?

When we use social media, we are responsible for our own anonymity and that of others. When we post or text, we should assume that we are publishing at the public level. When we break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others.

2. Can I attend a meeting online or by phone?

A.A. meetings can take place both online and by phone. The Meeting Guide app and the Online Intergroup of A.A. both provide information on phone and online meetings. Local entities like intergroups, central offices, area and district offices may also provide meeting information. To find your closest local entity, please search via A.A. Near You by visiting <https://www.aa.org/find-aa>. You can also request more information from your regional correspondent at GSO.

3. I maintain an Internet website and a personal page on a social media site. I also belong to an online meeting. At what level should I protect my anonymity on the Internet?

Publicly accessible aspects of the Internet such as websites featuring text, graphics, audio and video can be considered the same as publishing or broadcasting. Unless password-protected, a website requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio and film. Simply put, this means that A.A.s do not identify themselves as A.A. members using their full names and/or full-face photos.