

THE HOME GROUP AND ITS MEETING

Choosing and supporting a home group is an important part of recovery. A home group allows us to have an anchor each week where we can really get to know the people, and they can really get to know us. A home group should be a group that you are comfortable with and whose meeting you will attend regularly. Each N.A. member should make a decision to support a particular group on a weekly basis. We call this group our "home group" because it suggests a place where we fit in and belong. We have made a commitment to that group, and if we are absent for some reason, we will be missed. This is a real benefit to our recovery. It helps us in making a commitment to the N.A. Program and teaches us about responsibility and consistency. Someone once said "the only good reason to miss your home group's meeting is a death in the family--yours!" This statement may seem a bit extreme, but it highlights the importance of regular attendance at your home group meetings. To get a home group, a member simply gives their name to the secretary. Many groups maintain a small file box with an index card for each member. This provides information about the person's name and clean date. The information is used for commemorating clean time. Many groups prepare birthday cakes and/or present commemorative medallions as a means of celebrating recovery.

Having a home group is also important when voting on matters that affect the area, region and N.A. Fellowship as a whole. All recovering addicts who consider themselves members of the group and attend that group regularly, may vote on matters which affect that group and when that group votes on matters affecting the rest of the Fellowship. These may include approving new literature, suggesting or approving actions for Area, Region or World Service Committees, or a variety of other questions which come before the group. In the interest of equity, each member votes only in their home group.

Although Narcotics Anonymous is not built on the democratic principle found in the one man-one vote concept of voting, there is an application of that concept in the spiritual development of group conscience. A loving God will express Himself through group conscience and every member should have an equal opportunity to allow that to happen through their own participation. For one member to vote more often than once in the gathering of a group conscience is to believe that God needs help in speaking through that member by virtue of some special knowledge by that member. If we feel that an issue is so important that we

must vote more than once, we are not trusting in a God of our understanding. To act in this way places the member in opposition to the acceptance of a Higher Power described in the Second Step.

The difficulty over the distinction between "group" and "meeting" arose in part from situations where a small N.A. community or in a remote area or town wanted more than one meeting, but didn't want to have the headache of having two, three or more sets of officers and the necessary business meetings for each group. While on one hand there is no specific desire to force autonomous groups to conform and thereby believe that groups are no longer autonomous, the issue does have Fellowship-wide impact.

The lack of common practice has caused controversy and conflict when these practices are carried with addicts who subsequently move to an area where the practice is different. The controversy also involves the development of group conscience, fellowship conscience and participation at Area Service Committees.

In a typical situation an Area Service Committee found the conflict arose when it attempted to define its membership. Some parts of the area chose to believe Area Service Committee membership was based on the number of groups with Group Service Representatives, while other parts felt that each group, even if it sponsored several meetings could use one Group Service Representative, and should be allowed to have a vote for each meeting. The extension of this controversy can be seen when it comes to developing a fellowship-wide conscience. Unless there is a universally applied approach, some will exercise a disproportionate influence in the matter of Fellowship conscience.

The solution of this issue rests in application of common understanding that the words are not synonymous and that groups are the basic element of Fellowship structure and that each group sponsors one meeting.

It may be necessary for a short time for a group to sponsor more than one meeting, while a second group is developed. In this manner, the supporting group gets the meeting on its feet, helps with the procedures of electing officers of the new group and then returns to the management of its own affairs. The new group then operates on its own. Several months should be a reasonable time for this divide and build system of starting new meetings and groups.

A home group also encourages the group to practice the principle of the Seventh Tradition. The Seventh Tradition observed at the group level keeps the group self supporting by providing funds to pay for the meeting hall, purchase coffee or other refreshments, maintain a supply of N.A. literature for public

information purposes and for any addict who desires it. Customarily, most literature, including meeting directories, various informational pamphlets (IP'S), and "The Little White Book" are free to newcomers. This is not a hard and fast rule; rather it is just another way in which the principles of Step Twelve and Tradition Five--"carrying the message"--is practiced.

The Seventh Tradition is not a directive to individuals in order to qualify for membership in the Fellowship. Quite often newcomers are asked not to contribute, because we are all aware that financial security was not one of our assets when we first walked through the doors of N.A. On the other hand, in order to maintain a regular meeting place, meet our obligations, and remain free from outside influences, the Seventh Tradition at the Home Group level is one of the foundations upon which we build an atmosphere of recovery.

Most groups find that using key tags or ships to celebrate clean time is a good incentive system for new members and old members alike. By using the Home Group concept and encouraging members to celebrate their anniversary dates in the Home Group, a strong bond is developed that strengthens the commitment to total abstinence.

An important consideration in this matter is that a member of a group not have an office or position in another group. This defeats the understanding and purpose of the Home Group concept described above.

BUILDING A STRONG MEETING

N.A. is a personal and spiritual program of recovery, therefore a personal experience. Life stories, and/or N.A. principles or N.A. general information should be the main topics at our meetings. You may find the following suggestions, which were derived from our collective experience, helpful to your group. Meetings often take on a character reflective of the members who attend the meeting. Some meetings are boisterous, while others are quietly serious; some meetings are short, while others are long. Although there is no perfect time length for meetings, those which follow an established schedule and time limitation are usually the most successful. The meeting leader and secretary should try to keep the meeting on schedule. It should start on time and end on time.

Each group makes its own decisions concerning when and where the group will meet, as well as the format of the meeting and a wide range of other questions that will come up. This how the group exercises its autonomy as expressed by the

Fourth Tradition, " Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups, or N.A., as a whole." The meeting format chosen by the group will most likely reflect the particular needs of its members. These needs will be determined by the size of the group, the clean time of the members, as well as the level of support the group receives in it's area or region. A group just forming in an isolated area where no N.A. community has ever been established might opt for a "participation" format which allows for every addict to share his or her recovery with others in the meeting. Another very helpful format is the "Basic Text Study" in which the members read from conference approved N.A. literature and discuss how they apply the material in their lives. As the group evolves and it's members gain some clean time, the need to discuss and study the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions becomes more apparent.

The group may then either change or expand it's format to include a "step and/or tradition study," or it's members may decide to start a second meeting. In an area or region where many meetings are available, meeting formats are often varied. Among the most common are : "participation meetings," "step and/or tradition studies," "Basic Text studies," "speaker meetings," "half-speaker/half-participation meetings," "question & answer" or any combination of the above. Whatever format your group decides upon, it is helpful for the group secretary to type up a standard format so that all the group's members may become familiar with it. A standard format helps the group develop an identity and is also very helpful for the various members who are chosen from week to week to lead the meeting. With a typed format to follow, even the group's most quiet member may contribute something without feeling it necessary to have a vast experience from which to draw.

Experience has shown that the same basic organization for the group works in almost any place a group is started. We have also found that new groups which pattern themselves according to the commonly-utilized formats are the most successful. Perhaps one reason for this is that groups can learn from the experience of those who have come before them and avoid many of the mistakes made by their forerunners. It is also true that many addicts travel and attend meetings in distant areas. Because recovering addicts know that their very lives depend upon N.A., they may react quite forcefully if a great deal of difference is perceived in the N.A. meetings. Therefore, following the tried-and-true methods seems to work out best for all.

Coffee alone or coffee with refreshments are nice ways of welcoming newcomers to N.A. meetings. For many addicts, a hot cup of coffee is a reassuring sign that they are welcome, safe and comfortable in the N.A. meeting. This may become an important aspect of the meeting and should not be overlooked. However, we must be careful to see that it is handled appropriately. Do not let the coffee break become a coffee hour. Coffee and other refreshments, when made available and used properly, encourage people to socialize and get to know each other better. It also allows members who have been clean awhile to introduce themselves and offer support and phone numbers to the newcomers who have been identified during the meeting. We can all remember when we first came to N.A. how frightened we were, how alone we felt, and how we welcomed that initial smile or extended hand. When we utilize a coffee break to share our recovery with a newcomer, it becomes a small but vital function of a group's primary purpose. It is the living practice of the principle of attraction, and one of the doors which was opened to allow us to "keep coming back."

Another important point is that we use only Narcotics Anonymous literature in our meetings. This is another principle so simple that we sometimes overlook it. There is a wealth of written material available today from a variety of sources. There are prayer books, self-help books, books for addicts, books for alcoholics--the list is almost endless. However, when we are tempted to use non-N.A. literature in our meetings, we must bear in mind the Sixth Tradition which warns against implied or direct endorsements. To use outside literature is to endorse and lend the N.A. name to that publication or organization and it diverts us from our primary purpose--sharing the message of recovery with addicts. It stands to reason, therefore, that N.A. funds should never be used to purchase non N.A. literature. Buying, selling and using literature, other than our own, at any level of service, implies affiliation with others and violates the spirit of our Twelve Traditions.

N.A. meetings are conducted by addicts for addicts. This sounds so simple many might think it unnecessary to be stated. However, our Fellowship faces constant pressure to open the doors to membership for people with a great number of difficulties other than drug addiction. It is a compliment to our members and our groups when others with different problems want to join us. It is our recovery--the application of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions--which attracts them. We cannot be misled by this flattery though; our recovery is at stake. We cannot allow ourselves to be diverted from the single purpose of Narcotics Anonymous. It is this singleness of purpose, recognizing that we cannot

be all things to all people, which strengthens N.A. and gives us integrity. Those with other problems such as gambling, overeating, emotional problems and the like, can and do find help by adapting the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to their specific problems.

An important aspect of the need to keep N.A. to the singleness of our purpose is so that addicts who come to their first meeting can relate, and can identify with the others at the meeting. This is a vital point among addicts. We need to find others like ourselves, others who have been through what we have and can understand our feelings and experiences. A meeting that becomes distracted from this does not provide that essence of welcome that an addict needs at the first meeting. A meeting that moves away from our primary purpose and attempts to meet the needs of those with other types of problems will begin to exclude the addict from the new membership list.

If we keep in perspective when sharing that this is a personal and spiritual program of recovery, problems within the group will be minimized. An N.A. meeting is not group therapy, nor is it a gossip session. Recovering addicts attend meetings not only to share their experiences, but often to gain strength and hope through listening to other members describe how they have handled seemingly hopeless situations through working the Twelve Steps. In an atmosphere of recovery, we often hear solutions applied to problems that we were unable to figure out by ourselves. A newcomer walking into a group doesn't need to hear how many problems we've been through today; they know enough of the problems already.

MEETING LOCATIONS

Although many meetings have started in private residences, years of experience have shown that it is best to move the meeting as soon as possible to a public meeting place. In some cities there are zoning ordinances that prohibit meetings in residential areas. Also, neighbors frequently object to the increasing number of parked cars and strangers coming around. Therefore, meetings in public places are generally more successful and have fewer problems. There are a great number of organizations and public agencies that have room where meetings can be held. It may require some effort on the part of the group to find a good meeting place, but they are available. Check with nonprofit organizations, fraternal groups, public and private schools and governmental agencies.