

**UK**  
**MEMBERS**  
**HANDBOOK**

**Every Member's Essential Guide  
to FA and FA Meetings**



**FAMILIES**  
**ANONYMOUS**

# WELCOME TO THE FA FAMILY

So you have a group! Groups come in all sizes. Yours may be in some remote spot with only a handful of members, or in a large community with so many in attendance you sometimes divide into smaller study groups. The ideal size seems to be about fifteen people. Of course, it only takes two or three people to hold a meeting.

It often takes a while for a new group to get established and for people to start making referrals (and for prospective members to act upon those referrals and actually show up at a meeting), so a new group should not judge itself a failure if attendance is low for quite some time. Remember, if only one person benefits from a meeting, it will have been worth the effort.

All you really need for a successful FA meeting is an established place to meet each week, your FA Meeting Format and accompanying literature, someone to lead the meeting, and a kettle!

This handbook has been prepared as a guide to all people interested in a successful FA group. Commonly asked questions have been covered by way of discussion under each of the FA Twelve Traditions and the Four Destructive Forces. Please communicate your ideas for additions or revisions to the FA Literature Committee at the UK Service Office. For use with the Twelve Traditions booklet, this handbook is for you, about you, and by you.

Current information concerning your group's officers' names, home addresses, phone numbers or email addresses should be sent to the UK Service Office for inclusion in the FA Office Directory and for referring people to your meeting. An FA Group Registration card is provided for this purpose. If a group secretary has not, as yet, been elected, a temporary card should be sent in. This is very important.

**TRADITION ONE:**        *“Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity.”*

**What is group unity?**

Group unity is the harmony and strength that comes from a sense of our common purpose. It lies in accepting each other, with the realisation that we have different needs and that we grow at different rates. The more supportive we are of each other, the more everybody can be helped. FA is, first of all, a programme where we take our *own* inventory.

**How can I help my group?**

Once the time and place to meet have been established, BE THERE! It can be somewhat discouraging with just a handful – or sometimes just two – trying to hold a meeting, but most groups must go through this stage of growth. If people find out that a group can be counted on week after week, in spite of holidays and weather, that group will grow. If a new member shows up half an hour late and discovers the meeting room dark, They may never return.

Sharing group responsibility is very important. As soon as your group is formed and meeting regularly, volunteers should be called for to handle the various functions: getting the key and opening up; displaying the literature and keeping tabs on supplies; another person should handle the group’s treasury. The more people involved in the conduct of the group’s affairs, the better.

Familiarise yourself with the FA Meeting Format, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the Four Destructive Forces, About Drug Abuse and Helping. These are the tools that foster group unity. It is required that these guidelines be read at *every* meeting.

**TRADITION TWO:** *“For our group purposes there is but one authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants – they do not govern.”*

### **Who makes group decisions?**

Each group belongs to everyone in it, with each member having an equal voice. The ‘loving God’ part of this tradition can be thought of as the group’s Higher Power, the collective conscience of the group.

Business Meetings or Conscience Meetings are the easiest way to allow the group conscience to prevail. When differences arise, the final determinant is the group conscience, as expressed by a show of hands or a secret ballot. However, the outcome of such a vote must not be in violation of the Twelve Traditions or in disagreement with the stated principles in the Four Destructive Forces. Sticky problems may be referred to the UK Service Board and a Group Conscience Meeting may be called by any member to tackle a personal problem.

Regular Business Meetings should be scheduled. Depending on the needs of the group, they may be held monthly, quarterly or half-yearly. The Group Secretary normally calls a meeting, announcing it at least one week in advance, but anyone in the group may request a meeting.

### **What topics generally come up at a Business Meeting?**

A Business Meeting is a good time to take a Group Inventory (a Group Inventory form is available). Is your group well attended? Do newcomers return? Is the community aware of your existence? Who is doing Public Information for your group? Is it time for rotation of Group Secretary and/or other group officers? Do you need some special committees? Do you need to invite special speakers? How often? Is it time to form another group if your membership is too large?

### **What is the function of the UK Service Officer (UKSO)?**

Hundreds of enquiries about FA and personal appeals for help are answered each month. The UKSO refers people to established meetings and, via the Board Member responsible for New Groups, helps people who wish to start new meetings.

Here FA literature is edited and updated and then either published ‘in house’ or via a Printing House. Audio tapes/CDs of shares are reproduced. The DVD was made. This is the responsibility of the Board Member in the Literature Chair. Ideas for new literature and revisions to existing literature are invited. The FAN (Families Anonymous Newsletter) is compiled and published for distribution to all registered groups. This is done by the Board Member with that particular responsibility. Individual subscriptions are available.

## **How is the Families Anonymous UK Service Office supported?**

The UK Service Office is supported by the sale of FA literature and by regular donations from FA groups and by personal donations from individuals. The UKSO has normal business expenses such as employee salaries, office rent, utilities, (phone, electricity, water) website maintenance, insurance, Employers liability etc. It is only through the generous donations to the UK Service Office that our programme can survive.

## **How and why do we register our group with the UK Service Office?**

In order to list your meeting in the Where to Find directory and on the website, as well as referring people who may call in or email from your area, the UKSO must receive an official Group Registration Card listing your group's officers, meeting time and place and at least one phone number (preferably two) to be used as a contact for your group. Your group Secretary is added to our mailing list for any group news, FAN, Conventions, or other communications from your FA Service Board. You may have input to the FA Service Board Meetings by contacting the office and requesting that your group's questions be considered. The UK Service Board is made up of members like you who are willing to help make FA UK run as smoothly and as successfully as possible. Where appropriate, existing FA groups are notified of your new group's registration. The Group Registration Card must be updated with every change of officer.

## **What is the function of the world Service Office (WSO) and how is it supported?**

The World Service Office (WSO) is the international headquarters of Families Anonymous, Inc., located in the USA. The functions of the WSO and UKSO are very similar. The WSO, however, represents FA internationally. The WSO, through the FA's Board of directors, assists and provides guidance to international groups and facilitates and approves translations for countries where English is not the native language.

International FA groups, as their finances allow, support the operation of the WSO by donation. Donations are used for usual office expenses and provide the operating capital for publishing literature and the fellowship's newsletter, *The Twelve Step Rag*. The WSO also hosts a website which is linked to the FA E-meeting, which has worldwide membership.

International FA groups are registered with the WSO. When international groups establish National Service Boards, such as in the UK, they become independent in operation from the WSO. The majority of FA literature used here in the UK was written by FA USA, and is reprinted and published in the UK by permission of the World Service Board. A notable exception is the UK's *Twelve Traditions* booklet that was expanded by UK members some time after FA UK began in 1981.

**TRADITION THREE:** *“Individuals concerned with another’s abuse of drugs or related problems of living, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves a Families Anonymous Group provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is a concern about the use of mind-altering substances or related behavioural problems of a relative or friend.”*

### **Who may start an FA Group?**

Anyone may start an FA group, even just one concerned person. Although not bound by any formal rules, the members must use the FA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, About Drug Abuse, the Four Destructive Forces and Helping and follow the FA Meetings Format to qualify as holders of an official FA meeting. A Group Starter Pack is available from the UKSO.

### **Can I start an FA group without visiting an FA meeting?**

It’s done all the time. Of course, it would be helpful to visit an existing FA meeting but this is not always possible. Since FA is a Twelve Step programme, one could arrange a visit to a Twelve Step meeting of another fellowship as a non-participant. Contact the UKSO for telephone numbers of other Twelve Step Fellowships.

### **Where should the meeting be held?**

Churches, community rooms and hospitals are suitable. Bear in mind that banks, schools and other commercial establishments are closed at weekends, holidays and certain seasons of the year. It is not appropriate to meet in someone’s home. The meeting place should be well lit, easy to find and with nearby parking. The owner should understand the purpose of the meeting and be willing to provide the room for approximately two and a half hours. Many groups have found that after thorough searching they find a room given with no charge. In this instance the group usually makes a small donation each week to cover the cost of electricity and as a ‘thank you’.

### **Can professionals start an FA group?**

Professionals are often instrumental in the formation of a new FA group. However, it is important that they back away once the group has been established (see Tradition Eight). The UKSO handles all enquiries from professionals.

### **“As a group, they have no other affiliation.”**

This phrase emphasises that an FA group should be autonomous, independent and remain neutral on outside issues. FA groups should never be considered to be a part of any other programme or treatment centre (see Traditions Six and Ten). Discussion regarding any outside issues should not take place during the meeting time.

Outside literature should not be distributed or displayed at an FA meeting. Our FA programme is based on FA philosophy. This is where the emphasis must be placed.

### **What are “related behavioural problems”?**

By “related behavioural problems” we mean the patterns of escape and rebellion which so often precede or accompany the use of mind-altering substances.

Examples of these would be hostility, lying, dropping out of society or school, disrespect for law and authority, unwillingness to work, truancy, flouting the family’s or society’s moral code.

Drug use may or may not be a companion to these practices but, nevertheless, the same principles of family reaction seem to apply. The earlier help is received, the better for everyone.

### **What is a “mind-altering substance”?**

Any chemical, drug, or other material (including cannabis and alcohol) which acts upon a person’s brain and central nervous system, bringing about a change in mood and/or behaviour.

### **Are there any qualifications for membership?**

Anyone from the age of eighteen “concerned with another’s abuse of drugs or related problems of living” may become a member of an FA group. Unless accompanied by an adult, under-18s cannot attend meetings. The ‘abuser’ should *not* attend FA meetings. Small children should not attend and teenagers under the age of eighteen are encouraged to read the FA Youth Guidebook and Twelve Steps and any other FA literature they choose.

### **What does it cost to join an FA group?**

There are no dues or fees required to join the FA fellowship. Meetings are supported by the sale of literature and donations.

**TRADITION FOUR:** *“Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or FA as a whole.”*

### **How should an FA meeting be conducted?**

FA meetings are conducted according to an easy-to-follow Meeting Format which is included in every Group Starter Pack. The reading of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, About Drug Abuse, the Four Destructive Forces and Helping is a basic requirement at all FA meetings throughout the world.

Despite the seriousness of the problems with which we are concerned, many of our best meetings are relaxed, informal and, at times filled with laughter. The leader for the evening sets the tone by stressing their *own* successes and failures, rather than the painful details of their loved one’s problems.

There are several types of meeting. After the basic readings and the leader’s brief introduction, the meeting can take different forms. For example:-

1. Any of the Steps, Traditions, slogans or key words or phrases in Helping, Do’s and Don’ts, the Personal Inventory form, or any other piece of FA literature are suitable topics for group discussion. (See the end of the handbook for further suggestions).
2. Various members can give three to five minute talks, telling how they have benefited from FA membership, telling “what I was like before FA, what happened, what I’m like now.”
3. The last half of the meeting can be given over to a visiting professional or member of another FA group or fellowship.

### **Who leads the meeting?**

The FA meeting is led by FA members. Newcomers – that is, perhaps second or third-timers, should be encouraged to take a turn. The group should not depend on veteran members to carry the load. FA is based on “rotation of leaders”. No matter what their formal training, each member, by sharing their own experience, can bring something of interest and value to the group.

Although the newly-formed group’s Secretary carries the initial responsibility of securing a leader for each meeting, it is important that all members take turns and that *no one person dominates*.

### **What makes for a strong group?**

Member involvement and a feeling of warmth within the group. It is important that everyone has a chance to contribute. However, no one should be prodded to talk until they can comfortably do so.

Sharing of group responsibilities is a must. No one person should 'do it all'. Many groups rotate specific duties every six months. The Group Secretary should not hesitate to call for volunteers to handle such matters as opening up, making the coffee, ordering new literature and other duties. As the group grows, it may wish to have a Treasurer, Programme Planner and other officers.

### **What makes a good meeting?**

Good meetings result from honesty and willingness to discuss our own feelings, attitudes and reactions in facing our various life situations; keeping the discussion on the topic chosen by the leader; avoiding endless discussion of the abuser's story (we tell our *own* story and take our *own* inventory); raising our hand for recognition and avoiding cross-talk; keeping our comments brief.

In this programme, we help each other through honest sharing of our experience, strength and hope, not through giving or receiving advice or criticism.

To continue the fellowship, many groups meet for coffee after the meeting.

### **Are all those readings necessary?**

Yes. The newcomer usually fails to see how the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions can be of help to *their* particular situation. Yet, they are the heart of our programme. The value of repetition is borne out by the fact that we often hear one of the Steps or Traditions, or a line from Helping, 'as if for the first time'.

**TRADITION FIVE:**

*“Each group has but one primary purpose, to help those concerned with someone who may have a problem of drug abuse or dependence. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of this programme, by encouraging and understanding those affected by this illness and by welcoming and giving comfort to the families and friends of individuals with a current, suspected or former drug problem.”*

**Who is FA designed to help?**

Our primary purpose is to help concerned family members. Experience has proved that helping ourselves can be the most important thing we do to help those we care about.

Typically, the newcomer is looking for ways to change someone else. We hope they will see the importance of looking at their own role in the drama. FA is designed to get the spotlight off the abuser and on ourselves.

**How can such a simple, inexpensive programme be of value?**

The FA programme is deceptively simple but not easy to follow. This is true of all Twelve Step programmes. A real commitment to FA has often started the wheels in motion for a change in the whole family situation.

**How important is information on drugs and drug abuse?**

The family needs some basic facts. Your local library can suggest suitable material, as can local and national drug abuse information agencies. It is important not to become overly preoccupied with drugs and the drug abuser; rather, concentrate meetings on family reactions. Discussions regarding this or that drug, which drug is ‘worse’ etc. have no part in the FA meeting.

**Why is the newcomer important?**

The newcomer is the life blood of FA. We need the newcomer. Their pain and need awaken in us an awareness of our own growth and the need to share that growth.

**How can we “welcome and give comfort” to newcomers?**

By letting people know that they are not alone; that there is real hope for recovery; that our programme works and that someone *cares*.

Don’t overload the newcomer with literature. When greeting them, hand them A Letter to the Newcomer and encourage them to read it so that they will have a better understanding of what they are about to hear in their first meeting. Many Secretaries or Literature organisers have found it convenient to assemble a newcomer pack of literature (A Letter to the Newcomer, Does Someone You Care About Use Drugs?, Where to Find FA, Literature List & Order Form). In this newcomer’s pack some groups include a list of first names and phone numbers of members for use between meetings.

It is helpful to advise the newcomer to invest at least three months in meeting attendance before deciding if FA is, or is not, for them. After attending a few meetings, the newcomer should be encouraged to purchase a Twelve Step Workbook for personal study notes, as well as the FA Twelve Step booklet and to consider finding a sponsor.

There is no substitute for the warmth and personal interest we can show a newcomer. Save time at your meeting for questions and answers from newcomers.

### **Why do some people never return?**

Some may not be ready, some decide they're in the wrong place – some want instant solutions and find weekly meetings too much trouble, failing to realise the importance of group interaction. Some may misinterpret our programme as permissive, failing to understand the full meaning of “release with love”. Some find our programme callous and self-centred. In fact our programme is self-orientated rather than selfish – although, at times, we can best help others by refusing to be a doormat.

**TRADITION SIX:**

*“Our Families Anonymous groups ought never to endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”*

**What about being a part of community efforts?**

FA is committed to community co-operation. Our groups are free to co-operate, but not *affiliate* with any and all community drug abuse, alcoholism and mental health programmes. It is important that each group maintains autonomy and independence, except in matters affecting FA as a whole. This is true even if an FA group is located on the premises of another organisation and even if members of a particular organisation have been instrumental in setting up a group.

**What about the use of outside literature?**

Confusion can arise if outside material is duplicated and displayed along with FA literature. Moreover, the material is probably copyrighted and our well-meaning duplicator has broken the law. It is wise to discourage the naming of books, treatment agencies, professional counsellors and the like. Outside material diverts discussion from the FA principles.

**May a group reproduce FA literature?**

All FA literature (including the FA logo) is copyrighted. This prohibits anyone from using portions or reproducing the whole without express, written permission from the World Service Board.

**What about translations?**

Translated FA material cannot be distributed without express, written permission from the World Service Board.

**What about individual gifts or remembrances?**

In keeping with this tradition, money for flowers, gifts, ‘In Memoriam’ donations, etc. should be handled on a personal basis and not come from group funds.

**TRADITION SEVEN:** *“Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.”*

**How is a new group financed?**

Temporarily, one or two people can advance the amount needed for the Group Starter Pack of literature, as well as refreshment supplies for the new group. As the group treasury expands, these members can be reimbursed.

**How are established groups financed?**

Group expenses are met by the traditional passing of the basket/purse at meetings and by the sale of FA literature.

At the end of the meeting, it is desirable to count the money collected and record it on the Group History Form obtainable free from the UKSO.

**How is FA as a whole financed?**

The UK Service Office’s expenses for rent, salaries, telephone, etc. are met by the sale of FA literature and regular donations from FA groups and individual members. Some individual members like to do this by standing order and there is a form available from the Service Office.

**TRADITION EIGHT:** *“Families Anonymous Twelfth Step work should remain forever non-professional but our Service Centres may employ special workers.”*

### **What is “Twelfth Step work”?**

It is “carrying the message to others” as described in Step Twelve of the FA programme. Whenever we talk to a member, or prospective member, share our experience with an interested doctor, minister, teacher, probation officer or invite or refer someone to a meeting, we are doing Twelfth Step work. Speaking on the radio, TV or to a public gathering is also a form of carrying the message.

At the national or international level, Twelfth Step work is accomplished through our UK or World Service Office. The UK Service Office received hundreds of enquiries from all over the country and we must be prepared to give current information to the caller. It is important that each group furnish the UKSO with the first names and phone numbers of people willing to take calls and provide meeting information. Up-to-date meeting times and location information should be sent to the UKSO.

### **Why no professional counselling in FA?**

Professional counselling can be important and desirable for an individual and may be used in addition to FA but it is not a part of the FA programme. FA is a special approach based on *identification* which works through the sharing of experience by people who have ‘been there’. Some members may be in the helping professions on the outside but in our meetings they are just one of the group.

### **What is a sponsor?**

A sponsor is someone with experience in the FA programme with whom a member can identify. A sponsor helps another person learn the programme. By having a sponsor, a newcomer or a member in need of help can have phone conversations or email and have little meetings between regular group meetings. Sponsors neither advise nor counsel but offer emotional support in times of crisis. The sponsor/‘sponsee’ relationship is basically a ‘buddy’ system. The sponsor can help the sponsee with their work in the Twelve Step Workbook.

### **What are “special workers”?**

Those who are employed, such as Office Assistant, printers and accounting services.

## **TRADITION NINE**

*“Our groups, as such, ought never be organised but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to the groups they serve.”*

### **How can groups function without organisation”?**

“Never be organised” means many “trusted servants” accept responsibility to help a group to operate smoothly. The first necessity is a Secretary-Treasurer (later these jobs are often separated); the next may be the Programme Chair who selects (preferably in advance) a leader and topic or speaker for each meeting. As your group grows, a Public Information Chair may be added, a Refreshment Chair, Literature Chair and others.

It is important that as many members as possible be involved in the life of the group and to avoid the possibility of any one person “controlling” the group.

### **What are the duties of the Secretary-Treasurer?**

The Secretary normally arrives early, displays the FA literature, puts out an FA sign to direct newcomers to the room and puts on the kettle. Tips for Secretaries and the Telephone Guidelines are very useful and included in the Group Starter Pack.

The Secretary or Treasurer purchases refreshments, pays the rent, if any, keeping a record of each meeting’s finances on the Group History Form. The Secretary assembles newcomer packs and keeps a record of those attending each meeting, maintaining a list of phone numbers. This can be used to contact a member, to notify of a special speaker meeting or just to say “How are you?” As the groups grows, it will become necessary for the Secretary to obtain assistance on all group responsibilities.

### **Intergroups**

Newly revised Intergroup documents are available from the WSB should the need arise for meetings between groups.

## **TRADITION TEN**

*“Families Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues: hence our name should never be drawn into public controversy.”*

### **Should an individual FA group or FA as a whole take a stand on important legislation, rehabilitation programmes etc.”?**

In Families Anonymous we are in a self-help group which enables each of us to gain insight into and understanding of our own problems and, in the spirit of love, to share this understanding with others. As individuals, we can belong to any number of action groups to engage in public issues. However, as an FA group, we must not become involved in public controversy as this would immediately divide the group and focus on the controversy, rather than on our own emotional and spiritual growth.

### **Can an individual speak for Families Anonymous?**

As explained in our Meeting Format, each of us speaks only from our own experience and not for Families Anonymous. This can be an important point to bring out whenever we are telling our story to an outside organisation.

Guidelines for speaking at outside functions, particularly involving the media, should be obtained from the Service Office. One of the UK Service Board members is responsible for helping with Public Information.

### **Can an individual circulate a petition relating to drug abuse?**

Not at an FA meeting. Again, this falls under ‘outside literature’ and should not be presented at an FA meeting.

**TRADITION ELEVEN** *“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion: we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of our members as well as those of other recovery programmes.”*

### **What does “attraction rather than promotion” mean?**

FA uses the term ‘Public Information’ rather than Public Relations. Public Information (PI) is far more than mere publicity about the FA Programme. Elaborate publicity is of little use if people don’t like the meeting once they get there. It is more important to concentrate on warm, friendly meetings which meet people’s needs.

PI work involves all contacts with outsiders by our members, our literature and by UKSO and the FA World Service Office. Probably the most effective PI work of all is one member bringing another to a meeting. PI is working when a professional sees evidence of the programme having helped a family he knows. Our Twelfth Step work remains our best means of attraction.

### **Who is responsible for Public Information work?**

Everyone in the programme ! Nevertheless, each group should appoint two or three people to serve on a PI committee. The work is interesting, enjoyable and essential to the growth of all groups. Your UKSO Public Information Chair stands ready to assist in any way possible.

### **Why don’t more people come to our meetings?**

Remember, we are dealing with a family illness, one symptom of which is the mechanism of denial. People have been known to carry around a piece of FA literature for months before getting up the courage to attend a meeting. They hope the problem will just go away. They fear someone might criticise them, someone they know might see them at the meeting – or they resent the whole situation.

If group meetings follow the Meeting Format, the Steps and Traditions, avoid getting off the topic, avoid cross-talk and/or endless discussion of other people’s problems and concentrate on ‘taking our own inventory’, the group will grow.

### **How can we attract news members to our group and “keep them coming back”?**

1. Let people know of your existence.
2. Have good meetings once they get there.
3. A group member can phone the newcomer after their first meeting to see how they are.

### **How can we publicise our meetings?**

Most newspapers will be happy to print a news release about a local FA group. Such a release should be typed, double-spaced and written in a style similar to other news items. Guidance on such write-ups is included in the Public Information Pack and there are sample small adverts in the booklet: Spread the Word. A5 posters for use in supermarkets, launderettes, library bulletin boards etc., are also available.

Established groups can get a listing in a directory of community resources. Helpline numbers may be listed in the Yellow Pages and with local police and social agencies. Information on local meetings, with an accompanying piece of FA PI material may be mailed or taken by hand to selected professionals

### **What are likely sources of referral?**

Most people do not walk casually into an FA meeting but wait until they are in some kind of crisis. It is important to make contact with such individuals and agencies who are associated with people in crisis; namely helplines, probation officers, school nurses and counsellors, police officers, doctors, ministers and social workers. If even only one person starts referring people to your meetings, your group will be off to a good start.

### **Any suggestions?**

Distribute Professional Packs (see the booklet: Spread the Word) to likely referral sources. Invite a visiting guest speaker for the last part of the meeting. Display FA literature at health fairs, conferences, conventions etc. Public Service announcements on radio and TV may be applied for. Before taking on any large PI project, it is important to seek the guidance of the PI Chair. Many common pitfalls will be avoided by keeping in touch with the UK Service Office.

**TRADITION TWELVE** *“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.”*

### **What is anonymity?**

Anonymity is the preservation of people’s identity through various means, particularly the use of first names only. It is a principle which enables our members to speak freely at meetings. The most important things to remember is not to break anyone else’s anonymity. In other words, don’t give out anyone’s last name without permission, do not discuss what is heard at meetings and don’t reveal anyone else’s membership in FA or any other recovery programme.

### **How far should anonymity be carried?**

Many of us are well aware of the full names of other FA members. On a personal basis, it’s often a good thing to let our friends, doctors or ministers know of our FA membership. This is a personal decision.

### **What about speaking on FA at a public meeting?**

When giving a talk as a guest FA speaker at a public gathering, “My name is Bob R. and I’m a member of Families Anonymous” would be the usual opening statement.

### **What about “at the level of press, radio, films and TV”?**

Our Eleventh Tradition requires that we maintain strict personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and TV. This means first names only, or pseudonyms. In the case of TV, faces would be hidden or shadowed. Do not give your last name to reporters, publishers of directories or helplines. It’s all too likely to end up in print. Use caution!

### **What is meant by anonymity as a “spiritual foundation”?**

Subordinating one’s ego for the benefit of the group, serving others without financial benefit or personal acclaim. Most especially, it means placing “principles above personalities”. Most group problems can be resolved by reading and heeding the Four Destructive Forces.

**FOUR DESTRUCTIVE FORCES:** *“To enable our meetings to be truly constructive it is necessary to recognise and repress four destructive forces that can cause dissension and eventually destroy the group.”*

**“THE FIRST IS THE DISCUSSION OF ANY RELIGION.** *Our programme is open to all regardless of our various beliefs – or lack of belief. Each member’s understanding of a Higher Power is strictly a personal, private choice.”*

### **Is Families Anonymous a religious programme?**

FA is *not* a religious programme, although it is based upon spiritual principles. Attempts to turn the meeting into a religious observance distort its purpose. However, on a personal level, the programme can be tailor-made to each person’s needs. We are each free, in private, to give as much or as little of a spiritual dimension to the programme as we like.

### **The use of prayer for ending a meeting**

The use of a prayer is optional. The Serenity Prayer is one prayer acceptable to almost anyone, as is a minute of silence.

### **Suppose someone doesn’t believe in God**

No problem. As pointed out in the first of the Four Destructive Forces, lack of belief is no bar to membership. Either temporarily or permanently, a member’s Higher Power can be thought of as the power of the Universe, Nature or even the group itself. The idea is to gain strength to accomplish the difficult by turning to something greater than ourselves.

**“THE SECOND DANGER IS GOSSIP.** *We are here to share our feelings, attitudes and reactions to our situation – to help us in applying the principles of Families Anonymous to our own lives. Careless discussion of other people’s personal difficulties is contrary to the principles of our programme. What we say here stays here!”*

### **How do we avoid “careless discussion” of others?**

An important principle to remember is that in Families Anonymous, we try to tell our own story, not that of our spouse, our children, our friends, other members, etc. Of course, in telling our own experience, we may at times have to share details of another person’s story but at least we know where the emphasis should be.

### **Suppose someone gives endless details of another’s problem**

The twenty or thirty minute question and answer period at the end of the meeting is designed to give newcomers (and sometimes old-timers) a chance to pour out their pent-up feelings. Remember how we felt at our first meeting?

During the rest of the meeting, we can tactfully try to keep the discussion on the chosen topic. Our wisest course is to provide an example to our new members by sharing our own personal progress, shortcomings or over-reactions to the situation – in relation to the topic under discussion. They'll soon get the idea of what the programme is all about. Then we won't be guilty of violating Tradition Two or the Third Destructive Force by giving in to a desire to "direct, assume authority or give advice".

**“THE THIRD DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IS DOMINANCE.** *Our programme is based on suggestion, interchange of experience and rotation of leaders. No member should direct, assume authority or give advice. Our leaders are chosen not to govern but to serve.”*

### **Should we try to act as counsellors?**

Our assistance should be confined to the sharing of strength, hope and personal experience, as opposed to giving advice.

Sometimes there's a great temptation to 'play psychologist' and to try to analyse what and why people are feeling or acting as they are. If we can convey our hunches by sharing a story from our own experience, great. Otherwise, taking another person's inventory is likely to put people on the defensive, discourage honesty and eliminate the primary tool of our programme. We need to remember: identification is what makes our programme work.

### **Why do long-time members keep coming back?**

If we all stopped coming to meetings as soon as our own situation was rosy our groups would not be able to survive. Why do many of us keep coming back? Out of gratitude for the help we received when we needed it. Because we can apply Families Anonymous principles to our everyday problems of living and because we really can't keep what we have unless we give it away.

Some of our best help in this programme comes when we're trying to help others. The very first time a new member is able to share their story and help someone else, they begin to experience the magic of Families Anonymous!

### **“THE FOURTH DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IS DWELLING ON THE PAST.**

*Harbouring painful thoughts and speaking endlessly about hurtful times with our loved ones block our recovery. Besides being detrimental to our personal progress, continuous behaviour of this type within the meeting, week after week, is destructive to the group's progress and unity. Such behaviour can lead us back to the Third Destructive Force, which is dominance. Instead, we let go of the past by listening to other members reading our FA literature, and learning new ways to change our actions and attitudes, thereby improving our lives.”*

## SAMPLE MEETING TOPICS

### **WORKING WITH THE STEPS:**

- Step One      **RESPONSIBILITY** *“We admitted we were powerless over drugs and other people’s lives – that our lives had become unmanageable.”*
- A.      Can we control others’ lives? What happens when we try?
  - B.      Are we guilty for our loved ones’ acts? Their illness?
  - C.      Compulsive drug use etc. as ‘an illness, not a moral issue’.
  - D.      Wholesome family upbringing does not always prevent drug or alcohol use. Why not?
  - E.      Possible reasons for experimentation, rebellion etc.: peer pressure, search for identity, a bid for recognition. Perhaps to feel a hunger for power, excitement, spiritual enlightenment, friends etc.
  - F.      Should we try to solve other people’s problems? Can we?
  - G.      Do we stand in the way of their recovery? How?
  - H.      Not responsible for other people’s acts but for our own!
- Step Two      **OVERCOMING DEPRESSION OR FRUSTRATION** *“Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”*
- A.      How ‘sane’ were or are we? Examples.
  - B.      Do we depend on others for our happiness?
  - C.      Can we choose to be happy (in spite of our problems)?
  - D.      Do we think we deserve happiness? Self-acceptance.
- Step Three     **RELEASE WITH LOVE/LETTING GO** *“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God – as we understood Him.”*
- A.      What is ‘release with love’? Responsibilities and consequences.
  - B.      Choice, ‘tough love’ and the ‘freedom to fail’.
  - C.      Our response to manipulation, ‘button pushing’ and hostility.
  - D.      Effects of lecturing, questioning, moralising etc.
  - E.      Can we release disturbing behaviour and focus on the good people can do? What happens when we do?
- Step Four      **TAKING OUR OWN INVENTORY** *“Made a searching and fearless, moral inventory of ourselves.”*
- A.      Why should we? Our own? Or our spouse’s, relation’s or child’s?
  - B.      Credits as well as debits. Review of Personal Inventory form.
  - C.      How do you take an inventory? FA provides a Twelve Step Workbook.
- Step Five      **FEARLESS HONESTY** *“Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.”*
- A.      What are our underlying feelings and hidden motives?
  - B.      Do we need to be needed? Or looked up to?

- C. Do we resent our *own* shortcomings in others?
- D. Are we overcompensating for something?

Step Six **WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE** *“We’re entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”*

- A. What are our pet character defects?
- B. Changing rejection to ‘release with love’.
- C. Changing over protectiveness to ‘tough love’.

Step Seven **HANDLING OUR RESENTMENTS** *“Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”*

- A. Should we suppress our hostility? Or change our attitudes?
- B. When and where should we get rid of hostile feelings?
- C. Can we forgive ourselves and others?

Step Eight **DO OUR LOVED ONES BELONG TO US?** *“Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”*

- A. Have we handled our loved one like a possession?
- B. Can we not revise our attitude?

Step Nine **MAKING AMENDS** *“Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”*

- A. Making amends to those we’ve harmed. How about ourselves?
- B. Which is better – actions or words?

Step Ten **BACKSLIDING** *“Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.”*

- A. Complacency. ‘Slips’ and how to handle them.
- B. Our own ‘slips’ and others’. Quickly forgive – and start again?

Step Eleven **HANDLING OUR FEARS** *“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”*

- A. Are we praying or hoping for the wrong things?
- B. Is a crisis a good or a bad thing?
- C. What do we fear? Injury? Alienation? The ultimate fear?
- D. How can we handle our fears? How to sleep at night?

Step Twelve **CARRYING THE MESSAGE TO OTHERS** *“Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”*

- A. What is a spiritual awakening?
- B. How can we carry the FA message? What is the message?

## SOME FA SLOGANS

**FIRST THINGS FIRST** – What’s most important to us? What used to be? How has the FA programme helped the most?

**ONE DAY AT A TIME** – How can we trust those who have violated our trust? Does it help to wipe the slate clean each day? Should we forget as well as forgive? Can we?

**LISTEN AND LEARN** – Communication. Does a basic respect for each person help? What about compassion? Listening with an open mind. Listening for feelings. Suppose someone is ‘high’ – can we communicate. Is talking through hostile feelings better than acting on them? How far should this go? How can we avoid responding with a verbal put-down? Examples of comments that have a negative effect. Should we try to let them know we understand their feelings. Do we really understand?

**EASY DOES IT** – Resolving conflicts. Avoiding rigidity. Deciding who has what problem. Should we ask for possible solutions or merely ‘lay down the law’? Which is better: arbitrary rules or mutual agreements?

**JUST FOR TODAY** – Not trying to improve or regulate anyone but ourselves.

## SOME FA LITERATURE

### **A GUIDE FOR THE FAMILY OF THE DRUG ABUSER**

**A FAMILY ILLNESS.** What do we mean by a family illness? Do we have a compulsion to try to solve other people’s problems? Why? Do we lack confidence in them? Should we let others take the consequences of their actions? Are we willing to be embarrassed as a result? How can we avoid anger and anxiety? What is ‘enabling’? What is the relationship between hate and love?

### **A FATHER FACES DRUG ABUSE**

**ACCEPTANCE, APPROVAL, APPRECIATION.** What happens when we look for the good in others? What about the ‘friend situation’? What are the signs of low self-esteem? Does solving their problems for them help? What does help? What is unconditional love?

### **EXPECTATIONS**

What happens when we expect too much of people? When we expect too little? Self-fulfilling prophecies. What are the hazards of projecting into the future?

### **DO’S AND DON’TS**

What should we do when we feel that our toes are stepped on? Are we concerned about our own wants or our own needs? Does it help to tell ‘how it is with me’? How important is co-operative atmosphere?

### **THE SERENITY PRAYER**

What should we accept? What should we try to change? How can we acquire the ‘wisdom to know the difference’?

### **DVD: DRUG ABUSE IS A FAMILY ILLNESS**

A PI tool. Has the group seen it?

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## NOTES

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