

WOMEN & MEN TOGETHER IN SA



Sexaholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover. Women have been part of SA from its beginning, yet they often find themselves a distinct minority in SA. Many meetings have few or no women at all. In other cases, men can be the minority. Yet all members need the SA solution.

This pamphlet provides our best experience as a guide to SA groups in incorporating all members safely into the fellowship. We recognize that many SA groups are small and may not be able to implement some of the suggestions, but such groups can do the best they can. When SA groups take care to welcome members of either sex, and create a safe and respectful environment for everyone, SA's message of recovery can be heard by all. It is strongly recommended to read the section "Mixed Meetings" on pages 178-179 of *Sexaholics Anonymous* where the importance of this principle is outlined.

SA groups seem to work best when they take care to welcome newcomers of either sex. When phone or email volunteers don't respond to female inquirers or women are turned away from meetings, we move further away from a solution to this problem. However, when SA groups foster unity for everyone, "Fellowship is where the action is, where the magic is, where Connection is,



where feeling a part of is” (SA 158). With that unity, SA’s message of sobriety and recovery from lust can be heard.

The following experiences of SA members and groups are presented as examples of their growth through the exercise of the group conscience. SA Tradition 1 (SA 209) states: “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity.” The overarching goal of this pamphlet is to empower women and men to work together to carry the SA message to those who still suffer and introduce them to SA. These are primarily newcomers or those returning after a period of absence, female and male, who contact SAICO or a local intergroup in the hope of plugging into the SA program. We offer some examples of the ways different groups have made this possible through their group conscience.

Welcome Packets

Any newcomer to SA needs information on how to get started in recovery. Groups often have basic literature for sale and recommend that a newcomer start with:

- *Sexaholics Anonymous*, also known as The White Book
- *Alcoholics Anonymous*, also known as The Big Book which contains the original instructions on how to work the Twelve Steps
- *The AA 12 Steps & 12 Traditions*
- *Step into Action*, the SA guide to working the Steps

- *The Real Connection*, the SA book of daily meditations

Often, groups will give the newcomer a package of literature that can include pamphlets from the SA International Central Office (SAICO), such as:

- *The SA Brochure*
- *SA to the Newcomer*
- *Why Stop Lusting?*
- *Why Working the Steps Is Important*
- *Do You Have a Problem with Pornography or Lust on the Internet?*
- *Does a Male Have to Have Sex? (for newcomer men)*
- *Is SA for Me? Am I Too Young to Be a Sexaholic?*
- *A flash drive with the recording "To the Newcomer" by Jesse L.*

A welcome packet especially for women might also include the following:

- The comprehensive Women's Welcome Packet on www.sa.org
- *SA Is For Women* (pamphlet available from SAICO)
- A flash drive containing the SA video "For Women"
- Specific contact information for sober women or long-term sober men



who have agreed to give out their information to new SA women

- How to contact SAICO for information on contacting other women in SA

One member shares:

“When I attended my first SA meeting, there were no other women in the room. I was very uncomfortable. Thankfully, one of the long-term sober men handed me a package of information specific to women that included how to get in touch with other sober women in the fellowship. That contact started me on my road to recovery.”

Newcomer Meetings

Many SA groups offer a special type of meeting for newcomers utilizing a special newcomer format. Other groups invite the newcomer to a side meeting with 2-4 long-term sober members or hold such a meeting before or after the main meeting. If the inquirer is a woman, there should be a woman SA member present if one is available to be a part of the breakout meeting. It is the practice of some groups to allow the newcomer to choose whether they are comfortable doing a breakout with members of the opposite sex, or whether they would prefer to stay in the main meeting if a member of the same sex is not available. This helps to protect everyone. It can be helpful for groups, through a group conscience, to set a certain length of sobriety to participate/share in newcomer breakout meetings.

In newcomer meetings we welcome others as we would want to be welcomed. The best way to introduce SA to a new man or woman is to tell our own story: what we were like, what happened, and what we are like now. In other words, we're saying, "This is what we're about; is this for you?" (SA 180).

After sharing, some groups invite the newcomer to share what brought them there. It is also useful to explain the SA sobriety definition so that the newcomer can make an informed decision as to whether SA is right for them. Also, it can be good to talk about the expected formats for sharing in SA meetings.

Two members share their experience at newcomer meetings:

"After our small group had its first woman call in, two sober members met with her before the meeting to explain meetings and SA sobriety. We took care to gather in a public setting to reduce any undue awkwardness. When the meeting started, the group welcomed her and told their stories just as we would have done with a male newcomer."

"When the leader suggested a small newcomer meeting in another room, I had a sudden fear of being there alone with one male member. I was very thankful that three members



volunteered to join that side meeting to allay my fears.”

Sponsorship

Our common experience has taught us that sponsorship is essential to the effective working of the 12 Steps. When we come in, we admit that we need help and ask a sober member who has worked the steps to guide us. This process is the same for men and women, regardless of the specific nature of our diseased behaviors. The group is vital in this step for any newcomer. Often it is with the help of the group that a new member finds a sponsor. The group can help the newcomer find an example of a life that's making it through working the program of SA. Most importantly, the group can help the new member connect with a sponsor of the same sex.

In many groups, temporary sponsors are assigned to newcomers as part of, or after, their first meeting. If no sponsors of the same sex are available, the leader may refer the newcomer to a larger group nearby. The leader may also recommend phone or online meetings where the newcomer may connect with other members of the same sex. In the case of women newcomers, if there are no women at the local, intergroup, or region levels to sponsor a new woman, she may be connected to the SA Central Office at 1-866-424-8777 or saico@sa.org.

“There were no other women in my first home group. The sober members suggested that I call SAICO for help.

I was very thankful that they were able to put me in touch with another woman who became my first sponsor.”

Meetings are a Safe Haven

“Considering what we are, reason might seem to indicate that we segregate to “protect” ourselves or so that we might have greater freedom ‘expressing our unique problems and concerns.’ We have found the very opposite to be true: In the long run, it has proven better for us to be together” (SA 178). There is safety in being together. “The ‘safe haven’ of being together is a marvelous refuge” (*Recovery Continues* 91). Below are suggestions to groups regarding meetings as outlined in *Sexaholics Anonymous*:

- We avoid inappropriate attire in meetings, out of consideration for others. (SA 178)
- Some groups, through their group conscience, have included in their meeting format: In consideration of others’ recovery, please wear modest, loose fitting, conservative clothing and avoid revealing clothing, including sleeveless shirts, shorts, sandals, and open-toed shoes (this includes both men and women).
- We are careful not to be a temptation to others in the way we talk about our sexual acting-out. We share in a general way in meetings and save explicit shares for our sponsor. We can quietly raise our



hand if others' descriptions are getting too graphic or suggestive. The meeting should not be a place where our lust horizons are being broadened. (SA 179)

- We avoid explicit sexual descriptions and sexually abusive language. (SA 189/198)
- We speak honestly of where we are today and lead with our weakness – this becomes the point of identification with each other. (SA 187/189)

Additional items groups have considered through their group conscience:

- Being considerate that some members may be allergic to strong scents, perfumes, and fragrances or find them triggering.
- Making sure there's enough room for everyone to sit comfortably.
- Respecting the physical space of members.
- Being considerate of other member's personal boundaries regarding physical touch such as shaking hands or hugging, etc.
- Engage members standing alone after the meeting in a conversation.
- Having appropriate conversations with members of the opposite sex.

Two members share their experiences:

“My home group has an additional reading in its introduction reminding people to be mindful of their attire. I appreciate that caution.”

“I felt very lonely at my first meeting until someone came up to me to welcome me and explain what SA was about.”

Service Positions

SA groups usually have ongoing needs fulfilled by the members, such as secretary, meeting lead, librarian, treasurer, and others. Service positions should be equally available to all members, subject only to requirements for essentials like sobriety duration.

“Service means working for and with members who have different stories, life experiences, hopes, fears, and expectations, all to help fulfill a primary purpose that binds us together. Best of all, we see how God works in us and in the Fellowship to help us adhere to the spiritual principles set out in the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts” (SA Service Manual, Chapters 1 and 17).

The fact that women are in the minority does not diminish their value as trusted servants within the fellowship. “Many of the early pillars of SA recovery were women members. Women continue to participate at every level of service in SA, from welcoming and sponsoring newcomers to participating in their local groups to serving at the intergroup, national, and international levels” (*SA is for Women*).



Through the service of the group conscience, some groups and intergroups have created a scholarship fund to help members attend regional and international SA conventions. Such a fund can be especially helpful to women who are the only females in their home group to allow them the opportunity to meet other women in the larger fellowship.

Two members share the benefits of service:

“There were no women in the meetings in my area. I found a woman sponsor when the local intergroup paid for my registration and hotel to attend the international SA convention.”

“As a male SA member learning about recovery, I learned a lot from a couple of long time sober SA women. As I watched them model certain principles in the program, I too started to practice those principles. A few of these women I consider mentors. In fact, after listening to one SA woman speaker share on the joys of International Service, I knew that one day I would do that as well. A few years later that became a reality in my own journey. I am thankful for the women that went before me, they helped me on my road to recovery”

Mixed Meetings

As more women come into the program, some groups, even long-established groups, are tasked with deciding whether meetings should be mixed, with both women and men. At this prospect, there may be some

reservations and discomfort. However, groups should remember that our drug is not really “out there” in another person, but within our own hearts and minds. It is this fact that makes our program so all-encompassing. Our problem is lust, misplaced dependency, and defective attitudes. Experience has shown us that after any initial discomfort from mixed meetings subsides, members come to see their benefit.

From SA page 179: “We benefit from seeing reflections of the problem and recovery from other points of view. For example, after the initial fear of having a woman member come into an all-male group, men typically have testified to its value, saying they would not have it otherwise. Likewise, when women work through their fear of such a situation, they too recognize the value of meeting together. We all have the same problem. When we disclose the thoughts and intents of our hearts in surrender, we identify with one another at depth. Our common problem is not sexual at all; it is spiritual. We identify at the level of feelings: guilt, shame, remorse, loneliness, resentment, anger, rage, fear.”

Instead of fear, we can look at the SA meeting as a safe, structured place where we can experience healthy interaction, perhaps for the first time, with those we’ve lusted after. Many, after hearing the experiences and struggles of fellow men and women, have begun to see others as human beings



and even as brothers and sisters rather than objectifying them. Listening and identifying are also ways to be helpful because they allow others to feel heard and understood. This is a significant and affirming experience from members of the opposite sex who are there to give rather than take. This makes having mixed meetings one of the most powerful things we can do for our recovery—being of service to others. Mixed meetings help us come out of our isolation as we learn to recover and live in the everyday world with both men and women.

This ideal of mixed meetings reflects the goals of 12-step recovery, that is to carry our message and practice our spiritual principles in all areas of our lives. But, members and groups alike can potentially take a long time to grow to the extent that they feel safe in a mixed meeting or as a mixed meeting. Therefore, women-only and men-only meetings may be appropriate for some members until they are ready to join mixed meetings. Of course, the 3rd Tradition and SA Meeting Participation Statement requires all meetings of any type to welcome with an open heart any newcomer that might show up, and when the meeting is over to gently educate them on the various meeting options in the area.

A few members share their experiences of being in mixed meetings:

“Being in mixed meetings helped me start seeing the men in my group, and eventually all men, as humans instead of objects to be lusted after.”

“Having a woman in my homegroup has helped me see things from a different perspective and appreciate women as people. I can now be in society and not objectify the women I work with.”

“When a woman wanted to join my home group, we were concerned about what it would do to our own sobriety. We were also worried how our spouses might react. So we voted to keep our meeting men only. But our two long-term sober members objected so strongly that they formed another meeting in an adjacent room that would welcome the woman. Over the next six months, one by one our members gradually moved to the mixed meeting. The benefit of having a mixed meeting was much greater than our fears.”

Maintaining a Safe Haven

While we have found it is better for women and men to be in meetings together, there is an exception to this: individuals who have not surrendered lust and are still active in the disease. Having such persons present in meetings where they make sexual or other inappropriate moves on members is a threat to individual recovery and group unity. Fortunately, many of these threatened members find safety and recovery in SA, after receiving support and guidance from long-term sober members.



Each group can take positive actions to maintain safety even in the face of such problem members. Discussing the issues in a business meeting can create a group conscience with positive solutions. Some solutions that many intergroups and regions have found effective include the following:

- Hosting and/or participating in Support for Women Conferences
- Forming a Support for Women Committee and/or Safety Committee
- Developing & distributing a handout of safety guidelines and appropriate interactions for all members
- Devoting a page of their website exclusively to orientation resources for newcomers, including safety guidelines and appropriate interactions
- Recruiting a sober woman to be a point of contact for female inquirers and newcomers
- Drafting and distributing welcome letters for men and women, both digitally & in print, to local groups
- Hosting workshops or devoting a meeting to topics such as welcoming newcomers, healthy boundaries, our 12 Traditions, Check Meetings, Group Inventories, and the “SA is for Women” brochure

Some local groups have also done their part to maintain a safe environment for all members to focus on recovery by:

- Including the following statements in meeting formats:

- “If you judge that another is getting too descriptive, you may so signify by quietly raising your hand. Although we regularly practice Anonymity & Confidentiality, reporting any dangerous situations or criminal behavior to the proper authorities does not violate any of our Traditions, and is recommended when the safety of another person is at risk.”
- “Please keep the names, shares, and contact info of anyone you meet or learn about in SA to yourself. One exception: if you experience or witness behavior that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe before/during/after a meeting for any reason, you’re encouraged to bring it to the attention of a trusted member and/or the proper authorities. Please read our safety handout for other guidance.”
- Studying the 12 Traditions of SA in depth
- Rotating SA brochures into their literature study, including “SA is for Women”
- Holding a Group Inventory every 6 months
- Holding Check Meetings as needed

When meetings are held online, some groups have incorporated the following steps:



- Creating a Greeter/Co-host service position for large/hybrid meetings to assist the host/secretary. They use the chat and/or waiting room features on some platforms to identify participants whose numbers/names are unfamiliar and to grant access as appropriate.
- Deactivating the private chat feature for meeting participants to keep members accountable for appropriate communications

Many of these preventive efforts have been effective. However, the occasion still arises when a member experiences or witnesses inappropriate behavior by another – before, during, or after a meeting – and reports it to another member they trust, perhaps their sponsor or a meeting secretary. The next steps can be crucial in maintaining group unity, individual anonymity, and/or physical safety of members, so the member receiving the report should prayerfully discern the next appropriate action.

It's important to note that reporting dangerous situations or criminal behavior to the proper authorities does not violate any of the Twelve Traditions and is recommended when the safety of another person is at risk.

Whether the matter is referred to authorities or not, the member receiving the report can protect the anonymity of all parties involved by seeking initial guidance from no more than one or two other members, such as her/his sponsor, a meeting chair, Intergroup officer, another trusted member, or by contacting

SAICO. Anonymity can also be protected by keeping the names of both parties as confidential as possible during the Group Conscience process, which may involve one or more of the following steps:

- Holding a private Group Conscience meeting of select members from the local group or Intergroup where the incident(s) occurred
- Seeking guidance from SAICO or other members in the SA service structure, such as a Trustee, Delegate, Regional Chair, or member with experience in dealing with such matters
- Appointing 1 or 2 members to address the matter directly with the sponsor of the person allegedly responsible for the incident(s)
- Appointing 1 or 2 members (possibly the sponsor) to address the matter directly with the person allegedly responsible for the incident(s)
- Holding a Check Meeting with the person allegedly responsible for the incident(s)

Regardless of the circumstances, groups and individual members must bear in mind that following Tradition 2, the purpose of the group is not to determine “what really happened,” judge the testimony of one member over another, or discipline members.



Such outcomes are sometimes better decided by the proper authorities. Love and tolerance are our guiding principles. However, consistent with the group's safety and unity (Tradition 1), it is sometimes appropriate for a loving group conscience to arrange for an offensive member to stop attending certain meetings or events, and to discreetly inform other trusted servants.

Is My Group Ready For ALL Newcomers?

The following questions may be used as a checklist for groups to use in group conscience meetings to determine if the group is ready to help the next newcomer.

1. Are we prepared to be a fellowship of men and women, and thus welcome both men and women newcomers?
2. Do we have a network of sober members who can welcome male and female newcomers and are available for outreach and sponsorship?
3. Does our meeting have sufficient space for women and men to sit together comfortably?
4. Do we have welcome packets for the next male or female newcomer?
5. Do we have an established format for newcomer meetings that will accommodate all newcomers?
6. Do our group readings address appropriate attire during meetings?

7. Do we have sober members who share on the meeting topics appropriately for both women and men?

8. Do we have members who are practicing positive sobriety in their interactions with all members that show they are improving their relations with others?

Conclusion

The SA Purpose states that SA is, “a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover” (SA 201). Thus, having meetings that are exclusive to a specific group can give the wrong impression to the newcomer and seriously impair its ability to carry the message of recovery to the still-suffering sexaholic. Therefore, “Let us keep our doors open to anyone and everyone who needs our help” (*SA Meeting Participation Statement*).



The Twelve Steps of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over lust – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. 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.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to sexaholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity.
2. 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.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or Sexaholics Anonymous as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers.
6. An SA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Sexaholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Sexaholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. 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.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The Twelve Steps and Traditions are adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (“AAWS”).

Permission to adapt and reprint the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions does not mean that AAWS has approved the contents of this publication, nor that AAWS agrees with the views expressed herein. AA is a program of recovery from alcoholism only. Use of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in connection with programs that are patterned after AA, but which address other problems, or in any other non-AA context, does not imply otherwise.



Statement of Principle

We have a solution. We don't claim it's for everybody, but for us, it works. If you identify with us and think you may share our problem, we'd like to share our solution with you (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, 2).

In defining sobriety, we do not speak for those outside Sexaholics Anonymous. We can only speak for ourselves. Thus, for the married sexaholic, sexual sobriety means having no form of sex with self or with persons other than the spouse. In SA's sobriety definition, the term "spouse" refers to one's partner in a marriage between a man and a woman. For the unmarried sexaholic, sexual sobriety means freedom from sex of any kind. And for all of us, single and married alike, sexual sobriety also includes progressive victory over lust (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, 191-192).

The only requirement for SA membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober according to the SA sobriety definition.

Any two or more sexaholics gathered together for SA sobriety according to the SA sobriety definition may call themselves an SA group.

Meetings that do not adhere to and follow Sexaholics Anonymous' sobriety statement as set forth in the foregoing Statement of Principle adopted by the General Delegate Assembly in 2010 are not SA meetings and shall not call themselves SA meetings.



I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of SA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

If you think you may have problems with sex or lust addiction, we invite you to join us at an SA meeting. Look for Sexaholics Anonymous in your local phone directory, call SA International Central Office toll free (in the USA) at 866-424-8777, or visit our web site at sa.org. Online meetings and remote contacts are also available.

Additional copies of this pamphlet and a literature list can be ordered from:

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