

BETTER TIMES



Produced for A.A. members by A.A. members in the GTA **March 2020**

OUR COMMON WELFARE: SAFETY IN A.A. PANEL

Saturday March 21st 2020 - 4:00 pm
Sheraton Centre Toronto

The Safety Panel will feature:

The General Service Conference Experience

Presentation by Rob M., Area 83 Delegate

Practical Suggestions for Groups on Safety

Presentation by Kim S., Area 83 Immediate Past Delegate

plus
EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH and HOPE
in addressing safety issues in A.A.

ORC
2020
IF YOU WANT
WHAT WE HAVE

OUR COMMON WELFARE: Safety in A.A.

It is not unusual for an A.A. group to have to deal with the issue of safety in one way or another whether it's the:

"13th Stepper"
the vulgar member
the verbally abusive member
the aggressive or even assaultive behaviour
sexist language
racist language
unwanted physical touching etc.

the issue of safety can manifest itself in any number of ways. And while such behaviour is, in and of itself problematic, how a group responds can also present its own set of issues.

In *BETTER TIMES* this month we are turning the spotlight on the issue of safety in A.A. In 2020 the Greater Toronto Area Intergroup will be undertaking several initiatives related to this issue, the intent being to encourage discussion at the group level.

In keeping with the [4th Tradition](#), every group is autonomous. Every group is free to determine its own procedures, practices, rituals. The only limitation, according to the collective conscience of A.A.'s everywhere, is when those procedures, practices or rituals affect other groups or A.A. as a whole.

While every group is autonomous, there are certain issues that are common to most groups and it is clear that all groups can benefit from a collective discussion of those issues so that, when called upon to form a group conscience they can do so on the basis of an informed group conscience.

Our hope is to stimulate a discussion of this topic at the group level, in the interest of promoting our common welfare.

It is one of the principal reasons why we A.A.'s come together at the Intergroup, District, Area and General Service Conference levels, in order to collectively benefit from common experiences and the lessons learned.

It is why the General Service Conference (GSC) has focussed on this topic in recent years. There are several pieces of Conference-approved literature dealing with safety in A.A. that have been produced as the result of the GSC's deliberations and that are instructive. With the approval of [Alcoholics Anonymous World Services](#) we have reproduced the [Safety Card for A.A. Groups](#) also known as the "Yellow Card" in this issue.

This year's Ontario Regional Conference (ORC) will also be featuring a panel on the topic and the Greater Toronto Area Intergroup is planning a workshop in May 2020 that will be open to all groups and A.A. members.

Experience suggests that problems are best handled that are anticipated and planned for beforehand. By undertaking a discussion of this issue at the group level, groups put themselves in a position to be proactive rather than reactive.

Our hope is to stimulate a discussion of this topic at the group level, in the interest of promoting our common welfare.

Nina L.,
Greater Toronto Area Intergroup,
Chair of the Operating Committee

Mark C.,
Greater Toronto Area Intergroup,
Ad Hoc Committee on Safety in A.A.

SAFETY IN ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

There has been talk lately of safety in the rooms of A.A. A fairly new pamphlet has been released called [A.A. for Alcoholics with Mental Health Issues](#). Unfortunately, when I came to A.A. in the early 70's there were no suggestions on how to treat members on medication, with sometimes disastrous results.

I came back to A.A. on July 20th 1971. The end of the 60's ushered in the era of sex, drugs and rock and roll! The older members at the time were not ready for the young people who came into A.A. These were days of many growing pains.

My first experience was with a sponsee who was also a paranoid schizophrenic. He called me one night in a panic saying some members were telling him to throw out his medication. If he had followed this advice, the results could have been disastrous. I told him only his doctor should tell him what medications to stop and to call him in the morning to talk about this.

Another experience was with an older alcoholic, Bob, who came to the Young People's Group regularly and helped with coffee and setup. Someone told Bob he didn't need his valium and told him to throw them down the toilet.

Unfortunately, he didn't have a sponsor to advise him so Bob followed this advice. Bob stopped coming to meetings. They found his body in the spring. He had committed suicide by jumping into the Rideau River in the middle of winter.

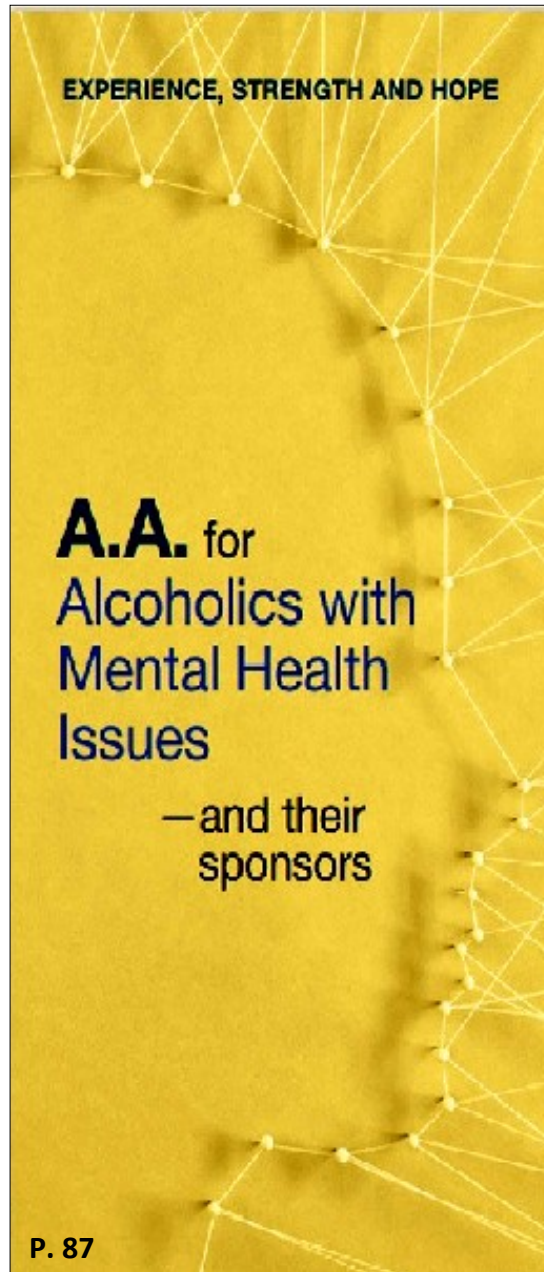
Even back then we had members with mental health issues and they also were harassed by well meaning members who were neither doctors, or health or mental health professionals. My sponsor at the time had a manic episode and had to be hospitalized. He was criticized and told if he had been practicing the 12 Steps this wouldn't have happened. Fortunately, he had enough sobriety to ignore this advice but other A.A. members have not been so fortunate.

I was always taught the 12 Steps were for my alcoholism and anything not dealing with my drinking problem should be handled by qualified professionals (doctors) outside of A.A.

Other doctors, as well as members in A.A. have thanked me for talking about this issue whenever I share my story at meetings and I continue to do so today because the problem still exists. I caution all members who speak to me

about this problem to only take direction on their medications from their doctors!

David T., St. Clements Group



SAFETY CARD FOR A.A. GROUPS

(The General Service Office has made this optional statement available as an A.A. service piece for those groups who wish to use it.)

Suggested Statement on Safety

Our group endeavors to provide a safe meeting place for all attendees and encourages each person here to contribute to fostering a secure and welcoming environment in which our meetings can take place. As our Traditions remind us, the formation and operation of an A.A. group resides with the group conscience. Therefore, we ask that group members and others refrain from any behavior which might compromise another person's safety.

Also, please take the precautions you feel are necessary to ensure your own personal safety, for example, walking to your car in a group after a meeting. If a situation should arise where someone feels their safety is in jeopardy, or the situation breaches the law, the individuals involved should take appropriate action. Calling the proper authorities does not go against any A.A. Traditions and is recommended when someone may have broken the law or endangered the safety of another person.

Service Material from the General Service Office

Our Common Welfare

Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

— Tradition One (Long Form)

It is hoped that our common suffering as alcoholics and our common solution in A.A. will transcend most issues and curtail negative behaviors that could jeopardize the safety of anyone attending an A.A. meeting. Nevertheless, Alcoholics Anonymous is a microcosm of the larger society we exist in. As such, problems found in the outside world can also make their way into the rooms of A.A. For this reason, groups and members discuss the topic of safety — to raise awareness in the Fellowship and to seek through sponsorship, workshops and meetings, to create as safe an environment as possible to carry A.A.'s message of hope and recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic.

MORE THAN A MEETING

SERVICE VOLUNTEERS ARE A.A.'S AMBASSADORS

As a District Treatment Committee chairperson, I help coordinate A.A.'s continued presence in five treatment facilities. It is an amazing opportunity that these facilities exist and eagerly invite A.A. to carry our message to their clients. In December, an issue arose at one facility which briefly threatened this invaluable relationship.

Several clients filed a complaint that one of our members made them feel unsafe. They reported that the volunteer chairing the meeting used inappropriate language including sexual references, and that he approached them after the meeting in a way that violated their personal space.

Staff reached out to inform me that they were reconsidering inviting A.A. groups into their facility. At the very least, the facility asked that this member not return. I spoke to the member later that day, explained the gravity of the situation, and asked the person to refrain from attending treatment meetings altogether. The person agreed. On following up with the facility, they were satisfied with the handling of their clients' complaints.

I felt strongly that asking this member to cease participating in treatment settings was the right thing to do, despite the spirit of our [Third Tradition](#), because two aspects of safety were brought to the fore: client safety, and the safety of our long-standing and continuing relationship with the treatment community. When in treatment facilities we must be aware of where we are and to whom we are speaking.

Facilities are comprised of a mix of people experiencing a range of trauma. Some are certainly alcoholics who perk up when we arrive, but not all. Many suffer from personal troubles or health issues unrelated to addiction; some are not clients voluntarily; and some are forced to attend our meetings. Bottom-line: these are not **our** meetings and we are not talking to a room of willing newcomers.

In treatment facilities we are representatives of A.A., there to offer our solution. Therefore, we must be hypersensitive to the needs of the clients. Aside from refraining from language and actions that are unacceptable in any setting, we must be cognizant that we are dealing with vulnerable people: some of whom do not want to see us at all, and some who are just looking for another reason to stay drunk.

There is a special and wonderful burden we assume when we volunteer in these facilities as ex-problem drinkers and as bona fide representatives of our society, but I concede that we are not all trained therapists. This is why I implore members to be extra vigilant with their language and behaviour, so that we do not do more harm than good to the potential newcomer, and to the partnership we have that has helped so many find permanent sobriety. It is a lot to ask, but the joy that comes when we see a tiny percentage of clients eventually summon the courage to walk into our rooms is worth the extra effort.

Sean L., The First 164 Group

The General Service Conference & Safety In A.A.

The General Service Conference has overall responsibility for capturing and reflecting the collective conscience of the A.A. fellowship. Every year the delegates to the General Service Conference have a myriad of issues to deal with. In 2012 they addressed head-on the thorny issue of safety in A.A.

At that year's General Service Conference, the delegates received a workshop report entitled '*Safety in A.A.: Our Common Welfare*.' That report motivated the General Service Board to strike an ad hoc committee on Group Safety. The report of that committee contained the recommendation that, "A policy statement from the Fellowship as a whole that A.A. does not condone behaviour that threatens the safety of any member should be considered."

That recommendation was taken up by the delegates to the next General Service Conference and the result has been two essential pieces of Conference-approved service material recommended for use by A.A. groups in North America: The *Yellow Card* [Safety Card for A.A. Groups](#) and the discussion piece [Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare](#).

For groups that choose to have a discussion on the issue, or are looking for guidance, these two pieces of literature are essential reading.

PERSONAL RECOVERY DEPENDS UPON A.A. UNITY

When it comes to safety in the group, there are times when decisions must be made on the spot. It can mean a great deal of uncertainty if your Group has not discussed what to do and how to do it. And that can mean problems later for Group unity.

A fellow who had been coming to my home group on and off for several years, and with whom I got along quite well, unexpectedly presented just that problem one night. I'll call him Paul, for the sake of his anonymity. Paul was an "in and outer". During his periods of sobriety when attending our group, he was the quietest, shyest and, in many ways gentlest person you could hope to meet in A.A. But one night he showed up inebriated. Friendly as always, he was welcome to stay and attend the meeting. He sat in on a step discussion room being chaired by a young woman who had just celebrated one year of sobriety.

The disturbance began almost immediately. Repeatedly speaking out of turn he would address the woman chairing the meeting. His speech became increasingly loud, disturbing the other discussion tables.

The eyes of the other members present kept turning to me as if silently asking, "*What should we do?*". I suppose they were looking at me as I was one of the longer-term members of the group, but that didn't mean I was in charge.

Nevertheless, I went twice into Paul's room, bent down and quietly asked him to keep his voice down, that he was disturbing the others. Each time he would say, "yes, yes, yes," and would be quiet for a minute or so. Then he'd start up again.

Excerpt from **A.A. FACT SHEET *What A.A. Does NOT Do***

1. Make medical or psychiatric diagnoses or prognoses, or offer advice.
2. Provide detox or nursing services, hospitalization, drugs, housing, jobs, money or other welfare services.
3. Accept any money for its services or contributions from outside sources.
4. Provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials, social agencies, employers, etc.
5. Engage in or support education, research, or professional treatment.

Now he was making more and more suggestive comments directed toward the chair.

He seemed to think it important to let her know he was attracted to her, a lot. This time as I entered the room, I could see the fear and upset in the chair's face. I told Paul that if he didn't stay quiet, he'd have to leave. He didn't like that idea and began a loud protest about how "this is A.A. You can't kick anyone out of an A.A. meeting. I have a right to be here, etc."

I do wish that I had the benefit before the fact, of my group's collective view of what to do and how to do it.

I felt I had to decide what to do then and there for the sake of the group and the security of the chairperson. Even though I had no endorsement from the group, I decided Paul had to leave immediately, and so he did, involuntarily.

There was some unfortunate fall-out. Several members, females, to my surprise seemed to agree with Paul's view that, "you can't kick anyone out of an A.A. meeting." At our next business meeting they expressed their upset about what had happened. When the group didn't support their view, they left the group taking several members with them, including the woman who had been chairing the discussion table! Paul has never returned and, over the past 10 years or so, I have not seen him around A.A. at all. I still feel badly about that.

I suppose there's never a simple or easy way to deal with such challenges when they arise, but I do wish that I had had the benefit before the fact, of my group's collective view of what to do, and how to do it. It could have helped to maintain group unity.

Mark C., Toronto

Our recovery is based on sharing our experience, strength and hope with each other, that we may solve our common problem; more importantly, our continued sobriety depends upon helping others to recover from alcoholism.



NAME	YEARS	DRY DATE	GROUP	CELEBRATION
Chris P.	1	Jan. 2 2019	King City Group	Feb. 3 2020
Chris D.	5	Jan. 31 2015	Prince Edward Group	Feb. 3 2020
Daryn G.	1	Jan. 12 2019	Crossroads Group	Feb. 9 2020
Daryl H.	5	Jan. 25 2015	Bloordale Group	Feb. 9 2020
Jen G.	5	Feb. 12 2015	Sisters in Sobriety	Feb. 12 2020
Lori B.	1	Feb. 10 2019	Lighthouse Group	Feb. 21 2020
Lorraine T.	20	Feb. 20 2000	Beaches Group	Feb. 25 2020
Richard P.	1	Feb. 28 2019	Bloordale Group	Mar. 1 2020
Kimmie D.	5	Feb. 1 2015	Keep it Simple Scarborough Group	Mar. 1 2020
Mike R.	1	Mar. 2 2019	The Parkway Group	Mar. 2 2020
Jay A.	15	Feb. 7 2005	Fifth Tradition Group	Mar. 3 2020
Randy C.	1	Feb. 22 2019	Brampton Bad Boys Big Book /MEN	Mar. 5 2020
Richard P.	1	Mar. 7 2019	Start Today Group	Mar. 7 2020
Scott M.	1	Mar. 8 2019	Prince Edward Group	Mar. 9 2020
Lynn T.	10	Jan. 30 2010	Lansing Group	Mar. 14 2020
Zak H.	1	Mar. 2 2019	Prince Edward Group	Mar. 16 2020
Jamey D.	1	Mar. 14 2019	Anniversary Group	Mar. 18 2020
Alan J.	1	Mar. 23, 2019	Prince Edward Group	Mar. 23 2020
Stan S.	50	Mar. 27 1970	Burlington Skyway Group	Mar. 27 2020
Marnie S.	20	Mar. 13 2000	Fifth Tradition Group	Mar. 31 2020

Beginning with our March 7, 2020 meeting, the [Start Today Group](#) will be moving back to its long-standing venue, the Ironworker Building on Munster. It's gone through extensive renovations and we of course had to give them the space and time required. They are now complete and although we appreciated that the Islington Seniors Centre allowed us the space to keep the meeting alive, we are going home. The meeting will continue to be held each Saturday at 8:00 p.m. and for the next few Saturdays will remain at the Seniors Centre, 4968 Dundas Street West, Etobicoke. Beginning with the March 7, 2020 meeting the new location is:

The Ironworkers Local 721 Hall
909 Kipling Avenue, Toronto
by the Kipling subway station;
Kipling & Bering

Come and join us as we begin our new lease on life with continued happiness, joy, and freedom.

Laura C., Start Today Group.

March 1941

Did you know...

The Saturday Evening Post article on A.A. by Jack Alexander created a national sensation: A.A. membership quadrupled in one year from 2,000 to 8,000! [See pamphlet 12](#)



Thousands of appeals for help were mailed to the New York office. The office asked Groups to donate \$1.00 per member for support.

This began the practice of financing the General Service Office (GSO) from group and member donations.

The Jack Alexander Article About A.A.

The Article that Marked a Milestone in the History of A.A.

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This is A.A. General Service Conference approved literature.

WORD search

SAFETY
IS
EVERYBODY'S
BUSINESS

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Please send us in your own words, your ideas, your journey experience, strength and hope 200-500 words to bettertimes@aatoronto.org *

SAFETY IN A.A. *no hidden word this month*

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Last month's hidden word: BELIEVE

* Opinions expressed in *BETTER TIMES* are those of the authors and don't necessarily reflect those of the Greater Toronto Area Intergruop. The editorial staff reserve the right to edit submitted articles for length, content and grammar in accordance with layout and quality purposes.

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