

ACA Community Safety Guidelines

Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)/Dysfunctional Families is a Twelve Step, program of men and women who grew up in homes where abuse, neglect, and trauma often prevailed. The ACA Community offers fellow travelers an opportunity to share their experiences in a safe non-judgmental environment. Members explore and grieve their pasts and discover subsequent patterns of behavior and belief systems. Because of the deep level of self-expression that takes place within our meetings and communities it is important that a compassionate and caring environment be maintained that ensures continued healing for members and also contributes to the hope of carrying ACA's important and extraordinary message to those who still suffer. Because of this, a strong commitment to meeting and community safety is necessary. The issues related to Meeting Safety addressed herein encompass guidelines for the ACA community. All members of ACA understand that our meetings, service structures, and ACA events are comprised of fallible fellow travelers who are on paths of growth and change, and we work within a framework of our common humanity that restrains from judgment and adheres to compassion. "Whatever your problems, we have had them, too." This flyer can be given to members when deemed necessary. Please note that the information provided here are guidelines and each group is autonomous.

By maintaining a proactive approach to safety, the ACA community is less vulnerable to the likelihood of recreating dysfunction, abuse and secrecy, and instead contributes to healing. Experience has also shown that if groups and Inter-groups do not take action regarding safety issues what can result is collusion and private discussion which leads to slander/gossip. Gossip of any kind within the ACA community is discouraged. It is healthier to address issues directly and professionally. Personal recovery depends upon ACA unity.

Guidelines For Member Action - If members find themselves uncomfortable regarding the actions of another member (before, during or after the meeting), or at ACA functions, please speak up. These reports will be heard and respected. Not doing so replicates family dysfunction. There are trusted members within most groups. Attendance and discussion at business meetings is the first option. If group members receive a report of potentially predatory behavior or of aggressive or other inappropriate behavior, they are strongly encouraged to treat this as a serious group safety matter. It is important that the family dynamic of secrecy or avoidance not be replicated. Groups are encouraged to seek assistance from their intergroup, region, or the ACA WSO if needed. While this form of direct response may feel uncomfortable, identifying inappropriate behavior is important so that the group may address it, and this preserves a safe, healing environment for all. Anonymity is not a shield from surfacing misconduct. If someone may have broken the law or endangered the safety of another, it does not violate ACA Traditions to contact the proper authorities. It is, in fact, recommended. Also, when it is deemed appropriate - suggestions can be made regarding additional professional help or recommendations to other 12 Step Programs.

Business Meetings should maintain an atmosphere of patience and respect so that more involvement is encouraged. ACA members appreciate being heard. The leader can stop rudeness, tone, impatience and condescension and say "It is imperative that we listen and speak respectfully to each other." (Tradition Two) This will ensure more inclusion and we are then able to ensure safety and we thus reach more inner children who still suffer.... which is the continued hope. ☺

Disrespectful, Aggressive, or Controlling Behavior - It is a foundational belief within ACA that members are groomed for whatever behaviors with which they partake and understanding and tolerance are our code. It is imperative; however that kindness and compassion remain the hallmarks of ACA healing. It is an honor to be a part of a program that is a committed platform for members to speak their truths safely. What people share in meetings is considered sacred, and should not be subject to approval or disapproval from others and should never be met with aggression or harshness. Aggressive behavior of any kind (control, domination, disrespect, disapproving looks, and harshly imposing opinions) within the ACA community is discouraged. Many groups have implemented the procedure of including in their formats verbiage that states that say "**Cross Talk** applies to **before and after the meetings as well**. If a person has a reaction to what is heard in a meeting, it is not appropriate to approach the speaker regarding what was said. Aggressive behavior of any kind within any ACA function is discouraged. "Meeting safety is the responsibility of every member."

Please see other side. ☺

The sanctity of what is said during the meeting remains in place for after the meetings also. Ideally, in situations wherein a member wishes to comment favorably to what a member said at a meeting what can be said is: “Are you interested in some thoughts I had related to something you said during the meeting?” This honors the privacy and respect for what was shared during meetings and gives the option of choice. Unsolicited advice or giving “approval” is discouraged. The focus for fellowship attendance is on ourselves and members do not attend meetings to “fix” or manipulate others or to seek approval.

Boundaries / Respect - Over time, healthier relationships are strengthened within ACA, and members explore their motivations regarding connection with fellow members and especially with newcomers. A friendly “Hello, my name is.....Welcome,” is appropriate. As boundaries are strengthened within the program there is mindfulness related to the importance of not using the fellowship for sexual, romantic, financial, or psychological gains. Self-promotion is also discouraged. Also, members are encouraged to allow newcomers to approach the people they wish to meet, not vice versa, or to at least to approach newcomers respectfully. Our guideline is attraction rather than promotion. Some communities have had problems where people like to sponsor many members to meet their own psychological needs and this is discouraged. Focus on self is encouraged.

It is also recommended to ask before going up to people and hugging them without asking permission. Regarding being approached for an uninvited hug - saying “No, thank you” or putting your hand up is helpful for setting boundaries.

Conflict of power - Some communities have witnessed situations where people in service positions or those with long term recovery have taken advantage of their roles. Positions of power and “time in the program” can involve a “mentor” type of wisdom that can be impressive to vulnerable members. There should not be a “grooming” of members to meet psychological or romantic needs or to set up any unhealthy dependencies.

Gossip / Slander – Gossip is a heartfelt issue for many fellow travelers and gossip of any kind within the ACA community is discouraged. It is healthier to address issues with others directly and professionally. Personal recovery depends upon ACA unity. If someone brings up the name of someone not present what can be said is: “_____ is not here for this discussion. Let’s wait until he or she is here to discuss this.”

Predatory Behavior -Because of the seriousness of this issue, meeting safety necessitates the specific addressing of predatory behavior. Unfortunately, sexual trauma is an issue for many ACA’s. It is always the goal of ACA to have compassion and understanding regarding the complexity related to being both a perpetrator and a victim. As a result of childhood experiences, those who have been victimized often become victimizers themselves and the term perpetrator has relevance. It is important that ACA communities stand strongly against sexual predatory behavior. A checklist is presently being developed within The Literature Committee discussing how to determine personal predatory behavior.

Experience has shown that perpetrators are able to detect and take advantage of those who have not yet learned to trust their instincts nor learned fully how to set healthy boundaries, and this puts members (and especially newcomers) at risk. Additionally, in some cases, it takes time before ACA’s are fully aware of what constitutes inappropriate behavior. As healthier relationships are practiced in ACA, members are mindful of their motivation to connect with the other members and especially newcomers. It is important that the members maintain awareness of the possibility of the fellowship being used to manipulatively solicit sexual encounters, romance, psychological dependence, financial gains or to establish any unhealthy dependencies. Members strengthen boundaries as growth is achieved in the program. A World Service Team is presently developing an excellent “Addressing Predatory Behavior” tent card as an additional piece of literature. The APB tent card is out for fellowship review, get more information here, <https://acawso.org/2020/01/25/addressing-predatory-behavior-tent-card/>

The WSO Committee will also be in continued discussion on meeting safety and will continue to establish guidelines on this important subject as fellowship consciousness grows. Within the world structure we are pioneers of new thinking. Your voice is important and proposals for change and growth are always welcome. Know also that there will always be respect for the minority opinion. Persistence and patience are our landmarks.

We suggest that this document be placed in a prominent place during meetings, so that all members, especially newcomers, have easy access to read it. Thank You!