

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS



**SAFEGUARDING
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
POLICY**

Safeguarding Alcoholics Anonymous

Policy Document

Introduction

All people, regardless of their length of sobriety, age, gender, race, religious beliefs, family or social backgrounds, regardless of health conditions, disability or impairments, sexual orientation, or gender diversity, have equal rights to protection from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia, in accordance with AA's Traditions, commits to promoting and protecting the welfare and human rights of **all people** who interact with, or are affected by, our work - particularly those who may be at increased risk. We have no tolerance for abuse, neglect, or exploitation. We will take a survivor-centric approach in all that we do.

Furthermore, Alcoholics Anonymous Australia is legally required to have a safeguarding policy, a code of conduct and a process of managing incidents. Therefore, with our unique responsibility structure, all members, Groups and Service Entities within AA share responsibility for protecting **everyone** from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

This Policy will assist the AA community in managing incidents of this type.

'Abuse, neglect or exploitation' means **all** forms of physical and mental abuse, exploitation, coercion or ill-treatment.

This might include, for example:

1. Sexual harassment, bullying or abuse.
2. Criminal sexual, financial, or other offences.
3. Threats of, or actual violence, or verbal, emotional or social abuse.
4. Cultural or identity abuse, such as racial, sexual or gender-based discrimination, or hate crime.
5. Coercion or exploitation.
6. Abuse of power.

Bullying is repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or group that creates a risk to health and safety.

Harassment is any form of behaviour that is not wanted, offends, humiliates or targets a person because of that person's sex, pregnancy, ethnicity, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or carer's responsibilities.

Discrimination is when a person is treated less favourably than someone else, because of an identified ground such as their sex, pregnancy, ethnicity, religion, age, marital status, ethno-religious origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or carer responsibilities.

How we should treat others

We ought to treat each other with respect and dignity, including by:

- Learning from others.
- Upholding the Twelve Traditions.
- Considering people equally without prejudice.
- Acting with honesty and diligence.
- Taking responsibility for situations, showing leadership and courage.
- Placing the collective interest over personal interest.
- Appreciating difference and welcoming.

How can Groups address safeguarding issues?

All Group members, and holders of service positions should be aware of this policy, the Australian Service Manual, and the Group Handbook.

As part of the Group literature supply, the Safety in AA flyer should be included and drawn to Members' attention.

Groups, through their conscience meetings, may establish contingency plans to deal with safeguarding issues. This may include having a plan on what to do if there is a safety issue and discussing the *Code of Conduct* and how it applies to the Group.

Districts and Areas are advised to hold regular workshops on safeguarding issues and ensure all holders of service positions are aware of the safeguarding policies.

Where safeguarding issues occur in a Group or service meeting situation, members in recovery have a responsibility to ask for the offending behaviour to stop. It is suggested that an explanation of the dangers of unacceptable behaviour in AA be given at the time, or at the end of the meeting. If the offending behaviour continues, then actions as described below should be taken.

In the case of a Service meeting the offending behaviour could include instances where individual Members and Groups have actively tried to dictate the conscience of service meetings through abusive and threatening behaviour. This should not be tolerated.

Offensive behaviour cannot be condoned. Failure to challenge and stop inappropriate behaviour implies that the offender has permission to repeat the offensive behaviour and can encourage others to follow suit.

What action can be taken if there are reasonable grounds to suspect an incident or unacceptable behaviour?

In dealing with any unacceptable behaviour the response must be measured and reasonable, given all the circumstances. Members should neither place themselves in danger physically, nor open themselves or the Group to legal repercussions. If an incident cannot be defused quickly and safely, Members and Groups may have to consider involving appropriate action.

'Reasonable grounds to suspect' means a person has some information that leads them believe that abuse, neglect or exploitation has taken place, is taking place, or may take place. It comes with a low burden of proof (in fact, no proof is needed at all), but is based on some information. Questions that may help a person to determine whether they have 'reasonable grounds to suspect' might include:

- Could you explain to another person why you suspect something? This helps to make sure that your suspicion is based on information, even if you have no proof.
- Would an objective other person, with the same information as you, come to the same conclusion? This helps to make sure that your suspicion is as objective as possible.

If the Group Conscience decides it necessary, unacceptable behaviour may result in temporary exclusion from the Group. The ultimate decision on the return of the offender rests with the Group Conscience. Note that exclusion from the Group does not exclude a Member from all AA meetings, but we need to remember Tradition One, 'our common welfare comes first'. Members should be able to attend a meeting and feel safe.

All members of AA must, as soon as practicable, report any suspicion that an incident has taken place, may be taking place, or could take place.

They may do this through direct reporting to:

- A Group Member such as the Secretary of their local Group
- In the case of in a service meeting, a Member holding a service position such as the Chair
- Any member of the General Service Board
- A Member of General Service Office Staff

When the behaviour or incident is of a serious nature and that a criminal offence may have been committed or when members feel physically threatened, then the incident should be reported to the police. If a person believes that another person is at risk of immediate harm or the victim of a criminal offence, they must dial 000.

Primary Purpose Service in Institutions

Institutions expect any member of AA attending prisons, hospitals or any institution requiring security clearance, to abide by the rules of the organisation and follow their safeguarding policies. See also Guidelines GL 16 and GL 22.

Telephone Lines/Live Chat

Volunteers responding to the 1300 number or Live Chat should be aware of the Code of Conduct and this policy. It is strongly recommended that volunteer management include a system for ensuring that each volunteer has read and understood this policy, its intent, and their responsibility.

Central Service Offices and Districts should ensure that a record of the roster of volunteers be kept in case a safeguarding issue comes up.

Safeguarding Children and Juveniles

There are times when children or juveniles will be in attendance at AA open meetings or AA Conventions. It is the responsibility of the Group Members to implement the Safeguarding policy. Parental responsibility is essential.

If there are safeguarding issues involving children, then the GSO Manager should be contacted immediately, who will manage the incident according to our Safeguarding Policy.

Minors Attending AA

Minors are defined as children and young people under the age of 18. We want to help minors who believe they may have a drink problem. It should be understood that minors do have the right to make their own informed decisions.

The New Member

Often when a new Member joins AA a feeling of hope and the lifting of despair can lead to thinking that every AA Member has their best interests at heart. Experience shows that most AA Members will offer great support, but a few may not. Groups may wish to include the pamphlet Safety and AA Flyer in their Newcomer literature pack, and encourage new Members to join a Group and participate in the Group Conscience.

Sponsorship

Within AA good Sponsorship is vital for both our recovery and service. There is a pamphlet *Questions and Answers on Sponsorship*, which can be very helpful and suggest that Groups have this readily available on their literature table. A man for a man, and a woman for a woman has often been suggested as working best.

However sexual and / or romantic attraction, regardless of sexuality or gender identity, can be problematic and may create safeguarding issues.

Good Sponsorship involves making the Sponsee aware that Sponsors are not trained counsellors. All we have is our own experience of recovery from alcoholism. We believe that most Sponsors would want to make the Sponsee aware of the importance of personal confidentiality and trust.

Staff

All GSO staff and staff of any entities associated with AA services have the same rights and responsibilities as AA Members regarding safeguarding. No AA staff member will tolerate abuse or exploitation in any form from AA Members.

Members of the Public

With regard to members of the public coming into contact with AA, be that at Public or Open AA meetings, or for any other reason, they are entitled to the same level of safeguarding as any member of AA.

More Information and Links

The Australian Alcoholics Anonymous Service Manual (and Guidelines)

The Australian Group Handbook

Safety and AA flyer

Code of Conduct

Incident Report Form

AA Group Conscience pamphlet

Guideline on Safety at meetings

AA Child Safety Guideline