

2023 Conference Committee on Corrections

ITEM C: Discuss service piece “Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare” (SMF-209) and its revisions.

Background notes:

The history of the development of service material related to the topic of safety and A.A. from its beginning through September 2022:

A key history document to review is Corrections Item C, Doc.3 titled, “AAWS Chair History, Revision, Feedback Summary of SMF-209 September 2022.” The history details that there were several safety related discussions happening at all levels of the general service structure, triangle, dating back for several years well before 2017.

The following topics are covered in the document:

1. The history of SMF-209 2017
2. The 2021 revision of SMF-209 and other safety materials
3. The 2022 SMF-209 revision

From a December 14, 2022, AAWS Board, chair memorandum to the Delegates to the 2023 General Service Conference:

Dear Delegates to the General Service Conference:

Attached you will find background material related to the agenda item forwarded by the Alcoholics Anonymous World Services (A.A.W.S) board to “Discuss SMF-209 and its revisions”.

Over the past two years, the A.A.W.S. board has received significant correspondence and several proposed agenda items (PAIs) related to this service piece and its multiple revisions. In recognition of the Fellowship’s high level of interest in this item, we are respectfully forwarding this to the 73rd General Service Conference for discussion.

Background:

1. [AAWS Service Material Ad hoc final report-Nov 28](#)

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2. Communications:

- a. To Conference Members
- b. AAWS March 2022
- c. AAWS chair March 2022
- d. AAWS chair September 2022

3. Sept 2022 AAWS Chair History Review Feedback Summary of SMF-209

4. Submitted proposed agenda items (PAIs) included for the discussion:

- a. PAI-16
- b. PAI-19
- c. PAI-36
- d. PAI-75

5. Revisions of Service piece SMF-209

- a. April 2022
- b. September 2021
- c. November 2017

**Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.
Service Material Ad hoc Committee
Report and Recommendations to AAWS Board**

This report was presented to the AAWS Board at their October 28, 2022 meeting. The AAWS Board formed a new workgroup to consider implementation of the recommendations contained in the Service Material Ad Hoc Committee report, as such this ad hoc committee has completed its work and disbanded.

The AAWS Service Materials Ad hoc Committee was formed at the January 27, 2022 meeting of the AAWS Board. The ad hoc consisted of Carolyn W. as chairperson, John W., and Irma V.

The ad hoc participated in 14 meetings, including 3 meetings with GSO Staff to seek input.

This committee was tasked to consider the following:

1. Review history of Service Material and how that has informed current processes.
2. Identify how the collective experience of A.A. is gathered to warrant production of Service Material and suggest possible improvements to that process.
3. Determine what defines Service Material and what determines whether a broader conscience is sought prior to publication.

Information collected and referenced:

The committee reviewed substantial reference information collected with the support of the GSO Archives and GSO Staff, a summary of which is provided below.

Research/reference	Outcome
General Service Conference (GSC) actions and committee considerations pertaining to service material.	A substantial quantity of information was available. To keep the research manageable, Archives provided several examples rather than every reference available. Further, a detailed review of the Advisory Actions was completed with additional review of GSC committee History and Actions.

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<p>Proposed Agenda Items (PAIs) pertaining to requests for new service material or changes to existing service material that did not become GSC agenda items for the period of 2018-2022.</p>	<p>There are several PAIs received each year to create or change service material, the majority of which during this period pertained to the AA Service Manual. These PAIs are referred to the appropriate department, staff assignment, board or committee and the submitter is informed of how it was dispensed.</p>
<p>Staff reports with reference to service material developments.</p>	<p>A substantial quantity of information was available. To keep the research manageable, Archives provided several examples rather every reference available.</p>
<p>General Service Board (GSB) Information – trustees committee reports, GSB minutes; search for any prior ad hoc committees</p>	<p>A substantial quantity of information was available from the trustees committee reports. There were no instances of General Service Board actions pertaining to service material processes, not any prior ad hoc committees of the GSB on this topic located.</p>
<p>A.A. World Services (AAWS) Board Information – AAWS minutes, publishing policies, search for any prior ad hoc committees</p>	<p>A substantial quantity of information was available from the AAWS minutes which included Staff Reports, AAWS Committee actions, and AAWS Board actions. Current and prior GSO Publishing Dept polices were reviewed. There were no instances of prior AAWS ad hoc committees located.</p>
<p>General Service Office (GSO): lists of all current service material, job descriptions that state responsibilities pertaining to service material</p>	<p>SMF-33 (list of service material) with office notes on recent updates/status, contents list for service kits and group handbook. Roles for development of service material were also stated in some job descriptions</p>
<p>Additional archives request to search the origin of the terms “service material” and “service pieces”.</p>	<p>Archives provided historical information going back to the 1960’s.</p>
<p>Review of methods of distribution/access to service material to ensure that the audience of the items is understood.</p>	<p>Service materials are available on aa.org website, in service kits, group handbook and through the literature catalogue and the online bookstore.</p>

Communications received by the AAWS Board pertaining to service material	The ad hoc committee reviewed recent communications and proposed agenda items received by the AAWS Board.
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1. **This ad hoc committee was asked to “Review history of Service Material and how that has informed current processes”.**

Origin

Service Material (or Service Pieces, Special Materials, Special Service Materials) were found to exist as far back as the 1960s, evidenced from dated materials in the Archives. Initially these were under the former “Group Relations and Group Services” desk (now Group Services) at the General Service Office. Early examples were of material designed to be of additional help to Armed Forces Groups, Hospital and Prison Groups, Individual Groups. These items do not appear in the past Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference and appear to have been developed and distributed by GSO based on group needs and common questions being directed to GSO.

Service material has fulfilled an important role of providing shared experience to groups and members when there is a need for timely sharing of information. This is not possible through the Conference approval process. Examples of these service materials include “FAQs on Practicing the 7th Tradition at Virtual Meetings” and “Responding to Disasters – How Can We Help?”. Additionally, the GSC has a large and substantive workload, the delegation of service material to GSO has allowed the GSC to focus on matters affecting AA as a whole.

Over the years, some service material was generated through the General Service Conference. See examples from past Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference below:

1960s/1970s

- informing non-alcoholics (institutional) staff about AA
- AA relationship with Al-Anon
- suggestions from Conference Approved Literature for closed meeting discussion topics
- guidelines for tapers
- public relations and public information displays and activities
- the advent of many committee guidelines, and the introduction of service kits

1980s/1990s

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- cooperating with the courts
- finance
- conventions and events
- intergroups and central offices
- primary purpose card (blue card)
- anonymity display card

1997-2006

-the formal delegation of Committee kits and workbooks as service material, "The (name) Kit and Workbook be designated as service material rather than A.A. General Service Conference - approved Literature."

In the time since, these materials have been reviewed annually by the applicable conference committee where there is one available, with GSC input reflected in Committee Considerations. Throughout the existence of these committee materials there have multiple, consistent and ongoing examples of trustees committee input on these materials, including the engagement of Appointed Committee Members with specific knowledge of the subject material in some cases.

Other relevant history:

- The Singleness of Purpose (Blue Card) has been referred to as service material in advisory actions, yet review and revision has consistently been done through advisory actions of the GSC
- Other items such as the Preamble, the Responsibility Declaration and the Declaration of Unity began as service items or editorial text and yet have become widely understood to be under GSC purview.
- Portions of and excerpts from service material have been added to Conference Approved Literature through advisory actions of the GSC (on topics including anonymity, internet, safety)
- The AA Service Manual combined with the Twelve Concepts is service material but is routinely reviewed and revised through the General Service Conference Committee on Report and Charter.
- In recent years the vast majority of GSC input on service material has been in the form of committee considerations, with a common understanding that service material does not require conference approval but that the conference may assert its authority when it chooses to.

Current Practices (2006-Present):

These practices vary and differ depending on the specific items of service material:

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- Those items that have previously been approved or amended by Advisory Action remain under the purview of the General Service Conference.
- Materials for service committees (kits, workbooks, committee related guidelines, self-support package) are under the authority of GSO as delegated formally by the General Service Conference. As a matter of both tradition and process these materials are subject to review and input from the relevant Trustees Committees and Conference Committees.
- Reference and resource material that requires updating such as “Estimates of Groups and Members”, “Fellowships Similar to AA” and “AA Literature Catalogue”, Staff Assignments list, materials to support groups with listing/records and those based on archives FAQs are routinely updated by GSO under their delegated authority.
- AA Guidelines have consistent processes where materials are either attached to a service committee and receive the input of Trustees and Conference Committees (through the review of the service kits) or pertain to more general topics and are overseen by the Group Service assignment and changes receive input from Staff on various assignments with changes reported to the AAWS Board.
- There are other materials where the current processes are not as formally defined. Examples of what these include are: “How to conduct a sharing session”, “Memo on participation of AA members in research and other non-AA surveys”, “Safety and AA: Our common welfare”, “Sponsorship – A vital stepping-stone to service & sobriety”.
- Several proposed agenda items requesting new service material, or changes to existing service material, are received each year. Unless there is a history of Conference Advisory Actions for the item, these are forwarded to the applicable Staff Assignment or GSO Department for consideration and follow-up.

Challenges and opportunities due to online distribution:

The ad hoc committee noted that at one time service material was only available to AA members through hard copy materials that were ordered through the literature catalogue or sent by mail from GSO in response to an inquiry. This unintended consequence of these materials now being readily available on aa.org is that they are now available to anyone (the general public, professionals, media) in addition to the traditional audience of AA members.

While we are sure that everyone involved in the development of these materials is conscious of this shift, the ad hoc noted that this circumstance merits systemic processes to ensure that new and revised materials are reviewed with this in mind, and no formal process was identified.

It was further noted that those viewing the materials are unlikely to be able to distinguish between AA policy, conference approved literature, and service material from GSO reflecting shared experience. Many AA members are unclear regarding these terms, and it is highly unlikely that the general public, professionals and the media will understand the distinctions.

2. This ad hoc committee was asked to “Identify how the collective experience of A.A. is gathered to warrant production of Service Material and suggest possible improvements to that process”.

The ad hoc committee met with members of the GSO Staff Services Unit (the GSO Staff tasked with Service Material), and there were 2 subsequent follow ups to seek additional information and clarification. The goal of the meeting was stated to be “for the ad hoc committee to understand what the processes are with the staff, and if there are any established parameters where further consultation is sought. The objective is to understand the current practices.”

Key points were:

- Updating service material is the responsibility of the Group Services Coordinator, working with certain employees depending on the piece. Then working with Publishing to get it translated into French and Spanish. Then working with Communication Services to get it posted the website, and then Publishing and Production to get it printed. Sometimes, sub committees are even formed, depending on the piece.
- The GSO Staff Services Unit is using SMF-33 - LIST OF SERVICE MATERIAL to review, see what needs updating, and annotate progress. This includes noting when updated material is sent to our Mailing room and Archives as well as when items are translated and ready to be posted/produced.
- The Publishing Dept “reprint list” is an important tool to determine when things get updated, there is collaboration with Staff and Publishing on this.
- There was some discussion pertaining to a PAI for a “12 Step Checklist” that was directed to the office since it was a request for service material and existing service material includes checklists for the 12 Traditions and the 12 Concepts. *This brought out some discussion about how it is determined if an item is service material because of its format (checklist) or does it need to be considered by the GSC due to its content (there have been multiple proposals for 12 Step study tools and workbook type items that the GSC has declined to*

pursue. It was the opinion of this ad hoc that designation of items as service material must be based on content rather than format.

- New service material or revisions to existing material typically get reported out to AAWS from the Group Services desk, so that the board is aware through their TCS committee. In this way the board is advised so that they are aware of what is being created.
- Topics are brought to staff meetings to gather shared experience from the perspective of both the assignment and what staff are hearing in their capacity as regional correspondents and through participation in AA events when invited.

The ad hoc committee had additional questions for the GSO Staff, those questions and their responses are noted below:

- What is the role of the Trustees Committees with committee-based service material?
Ongoing review based on committee considerations from the GSC, and any further suggestions that emerge from the Trustees Committees.
- If an item is not under another specific desk or committee, does it fall under Group Services? Yes.
- Are there any points in the process where Group Services (or other assigned Staff) identifies if there are substantial content changes and when seeking additional consultation is needed? This is an internal office process, there is an internal tracking list at Group Services that has each piece and where it would be located or who it is associated with. Group Services goes to whoever (desk assignment or department) a piece is associated with and consults them. Any updates “are going to loop in the right parties for a review, and not everything is solely by the Group Services team”.
- When an update is made, is there a place where we track when/if it’s updated, and how many previous updates have been done? Group Service has their own tracking sheet that has when things get updated. They also have a “previous versions” folder of service material to keep the older versions when they get updated, especially if people want to compare and contrast different versions from different dates.
- When Group Services brings in other desks to talk about particular pieces, can you explain what happens next? Do you report out to the General Manager or Trustees

Committees when it's released as an updated version? When it comes to updating people outside of our internal G.S.O staff, that is the Group Services Coordinator's responsibility, but this can depend on what it is, whether it's just getting updated or a kit rotation or replacement of a guideline, or the safety material that rose to a different level of office involvement and legal review due to requests from the fellowship.

- Is there any way the office quantifies the origin of a request? Or what the need is to create it? This would be captured in various reports/documents/meetings, not necessarily a centralized place. Historically, the older pieces were discussed in staff meetings, and the staff would record their discussions in their minutes for future archives reference. It was unclear if those staff meeting minutes are recording minutes anymore.
 - Is there a process where the questions "Does this require a legal review?" or "Should we consult the board before it's translated?" are asked? There is not a formal structured process for these questions. These topics arise in the discussion across all levels as the progress is reported to GSO management and the AAWS Board.
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3. **This ad hoc committee was asked to "Determine what defines Service Material and what determines whether a broader conscience is sought prior to publication".**

The ad hoc committee included the information in response to this portion in the prior sections.

Recommendations:

1. **AAWS Board redefine the broad term "service material" into subsets.**

An example of the subsets that could be used is:

- Conference Approved Service Material
- Service Committee Material
- AA Guidelines
- Other shared experience

- Information and Resources (International Facts and Information, Archives and History, Resources for Groups, Districts and Areas, Information About Services and the Service Structure)

2. AAWS Board request that GSO develop a Standard Operating Procedure (“SOP”) for each subset.

The SOP for each subset should include:

- Defined processes for the initiation of new material, substantially new content, and routine revisions
- Identification of primary sources of shared experience for the specific subset
- Formal consideration of what external input may be needed (legal, finance, subject matter experts from outside of AA)
- Outline of the review and approval process for the subset – noting both delegated and ultimate authority as applicable
- Working through the Communications Department define the communications, notification, and distribution process for items in the subset with consideration that on some matters Trustees should be advised prior to new or revised material being made available to the fellowship.

3. AAWS Board request that GSO develop a service material matrix

The service material matrix to be modeled after the literature matrix to track on items, and to include:

- How and when the item originated
- Most recent revisions
- Quantity distributed in hard copy
- Number of views/downloads of items on aa.org
- Once developed, oversight of this matrix is to be delegated by the AAWS Board to an AAWS committee

It is expected that this matrix will inform discussions of when revisions may be needed, when a topic is of high interest and may require resources beyond service material and/or if items may need to be retired.

4. AAWS Board request that GSO revise the format and design of service material.

The ad hoc committee suggests:

- Formats should identify and reflect the new subsets of service material
- Formats should effectively distinguish these materials from Conference Approved materials to facilitate clarity regarding the distinction between Conference Approved Literature and the service material subsets.
- Limit formats for new items and revisions to the use of only those approved and avoid the introduction of any formats that appear substantially similar to Conference Approved materials.

5. AAWS Board to formalize a review and response process for when complaints are received about service material.

The ad hoc committee suggests:

- AAWS Board, or a designated committee of the AAWS Board, be responsible to review each complaint, determine the appropriate course of action, and ensure that the complainant receives a response
- The AAWS Board will consider and decide if any interim measures are warranted during the review, these may include ceasing distribution through the online store or removal of an item from the website
- To the greatest extent possible, the complaint will be referred to those with the delegated authority for the specific item as identified in the applicable SOP

6. Update the AAWS Publications Policy

The ad hoc committee suggests that the policy but updated to:

- Define on what basis an item would be considered service material rather than going through the General Service Conference process
- Reflect all changes and processes adopted as a result of the recommendations of this ad hoc committee
- Note clearly in the policy that if an item is service material or not is to be determined by content not by format (i.e.: a 12 Steps Checklist cannot be considered service material solely on the basis that it is a checklist)
- Include an outline of the subsets of service material and note the delegated authority for each (in accordance with past Advisory Actions)

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- Reference the SOPs for each subset of service material
- Note that service material must be clearly noted as such by the use of consistent formatting and terminology

Alcoholics
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Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

475 Riverside Drive, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10115 / Telephone: (212) 870-3400

April 14, 2022

Dear A.A. Friends,

**Please direct all
communications to:**P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
Fax: (212) 870-3003

As we approach our General Service Conference, we are grateful for all your tireless preparation to fulfill your obligations of participation at the Conference.

As you know, there has been much concern within the Fellowship regarding the service material on safety as revised last Fall, specifically SMF-209. We wanted to update you on the ongoing efforts and our solution which we believe addresses multiple touchpoints brought to light in heartfelt sharing received by your General Service Office, AAWS Board, and the General Service Board.

The AAWS board met on Friday, December 3rd and discussed these concerns at length. Sharing from both G.S.O. Staff and from the Fellowship helped to inform our discussion. The board concluded at that meeting that a revision of SMF-209 was in order. It was also agreed that, in the spirit of unity and trust, the planned revision would be undertaken by office Staff and include the broad sharing received from the Fellowship as well as from our collective discussions among trustees, directors, and Staff.

An office working group was formed in early December that consisted of four G.S.O. Staff Members. This group met eight times over the next few weeks and a revised draft was presented at a special AAWS board meeting held on February 23rd. We then sought input from our legal counsel who also reviewed the two related service pieces, F-211 (The Safety Card for A.A. Groups) and F-228 (Safety and A.A. Flyer). At the March 10th AAWS board meeting, the board and office reached a group conscience in support of the revisions and we are now prepared to post this material on www.aa.org and again begin distribution within the Fellowship.

On behalf of your General Service Office and the AAWS Board of Directors, we would like to thank all who communicated with us. The active engagement of our membership in helping to make our service material beneficial to as wide an audience of alcoholics as possible is an integral part of the process. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in difficult discussions with as wide a range of A.A. experience as possible to help inform the group conscience.

In Fellowship,



Bob W.
General Manager, G.S.O.



Jimmy D.
Chairperson, A.A.W.S. Board

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March XX, 2022

Dear A.A. friends,

**Please direct all
communications to:**P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
Fax: (212) 870-3003

This communication is to provide an update on the A.A.W.S. board discussions and the subsequent General Service Office revisions to the "Safety In AA: Our Common Welfare" (SMF-209), "Safety and A.A. flyer" (F-228) and the "Safety Card for A.A. Groups" (F-211) service material.

A large portion of the material differs from Conference-approved literature in that it has not come about through Conference Advisory Action. It is produced when there is an expressed need for readily available information on a specific subject or in a specific format. Service material reflects A.A. group experience as well as specific and timely information that is subject to change.

The A.A.W.S. board met on Friday, December 3 and discussed the SMF-209 material at length. Sharing from both G.S.O. Staff and from the Fellowship helped to inform our discussion. The AAWS Board concluded at that meeting that some revision to SMF-209 was in order and that this revision would be undertaken by the G.S.O. Staff at its earliest opportunity, considering the broad sharing from the Fellowship we have received regarding this service piece in the spirit of unity and trust.

A working group was formed in the office which met eight times to discuss SMF-209. The revised draft was presented at a special A.A.W.S. board meeting held on February 23 and discussed one last time at the March 10 meeting. The Board and office formed a group conscience around the revised pieces which has now been forwarded for final edits and review prior to making it available to the Fellowship.

As of this communication we have uploaded the service material to our website www.aa.org.

On behalf of your General Service Office and the A.A.W.S. Board of Directors, we would like to thank all who communicated with the us for being actively engaged in helping to make our service material beneficial to as wide an audience of alcoholics as possible. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage in difficult discussions with as wide a range of A.A. experience as possible to help inform the group conscience.

In Fellowship,

Bob W.
General Manager, G.S.O.Jimmy D.
Chairperson, A.A.W.S. Board

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March 01, 2022

Dear Member X,

I wanted to drop you a note to acknowledge your correspondence with us and to update you on the AAWS board discussions concerning the 'Safety In AA' (SMF-209) service piece.

The AAWS board met on Friday, December 3 and discussed the SMF-209 material at length. Sharing from both GSO Staff and from the Fellowship helped to inform our discussion. The AAWS Board concluded at that meeting that some revision to SMF-209 was in order and that this revision would be undertaken by the GSO Staff at its earliest opportunity, taking into account the broad sharing from the Fellowship we have received regarding this service piece.

A working group was formed in the office which met seven times to discuss SMF-209. The revised draft was presented at a special AAWS board meeting held on February 23. Board and office formed a group conscience around the revised piece which has now been forwarded for final edits and review prior to making it available to the Fellowship.

In the interim, the current version of SMF-209 has been removed from www.aa.org pending publication of the revision.

On behalf of your AAWS Board of Directors I would like to thank you for being actively engaged in helping to make our service material beneficial to as wide an audience of alcoholics as possible. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage in difficult discussions with as wide a range of AA experience as possible to help inform the group conscience. We commit to keeping you informed as we move through this important process.

In Fellowship,



Jimmy D.
Chairperson, A.A.W.S. Board

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September 5, 2022

Leslie W.
DCMC, Area 06, District 08, Panel 71Claudia G.
GSR, Area 06, District 07, SubDistrict 005
Area 06 Accessibilities Co-ChairCC: Jennifer B. Area 06, Delegate
Bob W., GM AAWS
Linda Chezem, GSB Chair, nonalcoholic trustee**Please direct all
communications to:**
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New York, NY 10163
Fax: (212) 870-3003

Dear Leslie and Claudia:

Warm greetings, I hope you are both well. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation for your patience, and apologizing for the delay in response from AAWS on your questions related to SMF-209. It took me more time than I had anticipated, between other AAWS duties, to gather the answers to your questions from GSO Staff members, past AAWS directors, and General Service Board trustees.

I have tried to inform these responses well from these sources, but ask for some understanding as I am synthesizing this material and, in some cases, the information was not tracked and therefore is not available. I hope that you can appreciate, therefore, that the following information is imperfect, but reflects my very best efforts to answer your questions.

I am sure that you are aware that following these events, the AAWS board approved formation of an ad-hoc committee examining the process by which service material is requested, created, and approved. The work of this subcommittee is underway and I am expecting a report to the AAWS board in October. I fully anticipate, also, that discussion will continue specifically around SMF-209, as the fellowship has continued to respond to this material.

The responses to your letter are found below*, in three sections related to the history of the development of SMF-209, the 2021 revision of same, and finally the feedback and 2022 revision.

Thank you for your service and the questions. Such reviews help us to appreciate the history and scope surrounding a body of work and will help to inform our movement forward. If you have questions, please contact me at [x](#) or at x.

With gratitude,
Deborah K.
Chair, AAWS 2021-2022***Secretary's note:** see item C3 for History, Revision and Feedback Summary

**AAWS Chair History, Revision, Feedback Summary of
SMF-209 September 2022**

The history of SMF-209 2017.

You asked: *“What was occurring inside and/or outside the AA Fellowship that prompted the development and publishing of SMF-209, issued September 2017.”* There were several safety-related discussions that were happening at all levels of the triangle dating back for several years well before 2017.

While the following is not wholly comprehensive of all the early General Service Board subcommittees and sharing sessions, General Service Conference presentations, Regional Forums and area workshops, and discussions pertaining to safety, the following offer examples of such activity:

- GSB Subcommittee on Vulnerable Members (October 2009);
- Trustees Literature Committee (2014) subcommittee on Safety and Anonymity;
- Requests for literature/language related to safety (Trustees Literature Committee 2015/2016 noting AAWS development of possible service material related to safety)
- Trustees Literature Committee (2017) subcommittee to develop a framework for continued discussion and actions for safety material

Many of these included discussions on the possible formation of literature, guidelines, or policy statements related to safety.

In addition to this, GSO was regularly receiving reports from members regarding unsafe conditions and behavior being tolerated in AA, many considered illegal. Relevant public media stories included Gabrielle G./Monica R./CBS 48 Hours story, the PI desk had no written material to share in relation to internal or public queries related to safety.

By 2018, the Trustees Literature Committee and the Conference Committee on Literature moved into action with requests for pamphlet revisions that included language on safety. There was a 2017 advisory action requesting that language regarding safety be incorporated, where appropriate, in current and new recovery literature. TLC appointed a subcommittee to review existing recovery literature to identify places where it may be appropriate to insert the topic of safety, and provide suggestions on language. Around this time, we saw concrete example of safety language being approved by the CCL in our literature, such as into the ‘The AA Group’.

You asked questions related to who requested, wrote, and approved SMF-209. GSO Staff writes service materials, usually with considerable sharing, to capitalize on the broad sharing and experience across the multiple service desks. There is more about this below. In line with this, upon request from the AAWS board, a GSO Staff ad hoc committee drafted SMF-209, and the AAWS board approved it in February 2017.

The 2021 revision of SMF-209 and other safety materials.

You asked: *“What was occurring inside and/or outside the AA Fellowship that prompted the revision of SMF-209, originally issued September 2017?”* The yellow ‘safety’ card was approved by the AAWS Board in July 2017, but did not go through the same process as the SMF. It was met with ‘a firestorm’ of criticism and concern from members of the fellowship, and the AAWS board asked that GSO staff undertake a review and possible revision, ranging from discontinuing the

**AAWS Chair History, Revision, Feedback Summary of
SMF-209 September 2022**

card to a full rewrite of it. While this was occurring, safety continued to be a common workshop theme at Regional Forums and other settings. This also helped to broaden and inform discussions, and it was thought that an update of all the safety-related service material might be prudent. What began as an exploration into improving the Yellow Safety Card for groups gave rise to the idea of providing more sharing than a card could provide, and the idea of a Safety Flyer which could easily fit into literature racks (similar in format as the service piece 'The AA group Treasurer, F-96) evolved. The development and revision of all these materials was carried out by GSO Staff, with some input from the AAWS board (particularly in relation to the new item, the safety flyer). The revision was prompted originally by the reaction to the safety card noted above, but also by the continued broad sharing throughout the triangle. Service material is periodically updated by GSO Staff based on inquiries and perspectives from the fellowship that is shared with the GSO desks and in settings such as Regional Forums or GSB sharing sessions. It is my understanding that this additional sharing included the topics including: more predatory/illegal actions, misconceptions about anonymity, dealing with health emergencies, racism in AA, the impact of sharing gender identity/pronouns. The GSB 2018 Strategic Plan explicitly addressed modeling inclusivity, and Regional Forum workshops often addressed "Who's Not in the Room-Fostering Participation" from 2019 through the present day. Outside the triangle, there were examples of articles pertaining to racism and zoom meetings (eg, USAtoday.com). The 3 revised pieces were then approved by the AAWS Board in April 2021.

The 2022 SMF-209 revision.

The AAWS board chair at the time (Jimmy D.) called for discussion of the feedback received from the fellowship in response to the 2021 revision of SMF-209 at the Dec 3, 2021 AAWS board meeting. Sharing included input from GSO staff as well as the feedback received by directors and trustees from the fellowship.

You asked specifically how many letters, texts, emails, and calls were received by GSO, AAWS, and GSB trustees related to September 2021 SMF-209. I am loathed to say that I cannot answer this question, as not all feedback was logged systematically across trustees, directors, and the GSO. We are AA, and most of our trusted servants are not trained in systematic data tracking! While I know there was some attempt to track the correspondence, it was not all captured and documented. I estimate that if we had logged it all, it would be somewhere between 40-60 responses, but the feedback contained in each of these sometimes reflected the perspective of individual members and sometimes reflected group consciences forwarded by groups or even district discussions. Therefore, any number of correspondences could stand alone, or be amplified but without a clear indication of the number of people or groups involved in the feedback. The boards did not so much focus on the number of responses as the principles that were raised by the correspondence.

You asked about the range of opinions that had been shared. It was broad, from a welcoming acceptance of the new material to clear concern that some material was inconsistent with our traditions and our scope. While the full range was received, I would estimate that the immediate feedback was over 95% in the direction of the respectful or vehement expressions of marked concern. At the conclusion of the meeting of the AAWS directors, GSO staff was asked to

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undertake a revision informed by the sharing from the fellowship as well as the collective discussion among trustees, directors, and Staff. An office working group was formed which met 8 times over the subsequent weeks to draft this revision, which was then approved by the AAWS board, reviewed by legal counsel (along with the yellow safety card and safety flyer) and then approved for distribution at the March 2022 AAWS board meeting.

You asked specifically about how Service Material, in general, is produced. Service material is created by the office, utilizing the broad sharing that the service desks receive on a topic, and is often requested specifically by the AAWS or GSB boards.

Your letter suggested that the 2022 revision was ‘non-transparent’, one without consultation with the Fellowship as a whole. You asked specifically why the AA Fellowship was not invited to give feedback on the September 2021 SMF-209 before it was revised. Please know that there was never any intention to keep anything from the Fellowship. Rather, revision was requested of General Service Office by the AAWS board in keeping with how service material is created and revised. The General Office has long been entrusted with creating and revising service material as a way of making available to the fellowship the sharing that the GSO desks collect in their daily service functions. As such, broader consultation was not sought in the same manner as it would be for General Service Conference-approved pamphlets and books, but there was no attempt to circumvent the fellowship.

However, at the end of 2021, the AAWS also had concerns about the process of creation, revision, and processing responses, and felt that this warranted further study to ensure good practice, unity, and consistency over time. The AAWS board formed an ad-hoc committee examining the process by which service material is requested, created, and approved and expect their first report to the full AAWS board in October 2022.

<p>(1) Submit a clear and concisely worded motion.</p>
<p>I motion that the Diversity and Inclusion section from the 2021 edition of Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare replace the Participation and Inclusion section from the 2022 edition in the 2023 edition and that GSO commit to standing for diversity and inclusion and against racism, transphobia and all other forms of oppression within AA.</p>
<p>(2) What problem does this proposed item address?</p>
<p>The lack of racial diversity in AA. Racism and other forms of oppression in AA including the denial that these things exist in AA. The refusal of members who hold privilege to look at our privilege even when it obstructs our primary purpose.</p>
<p>(3) What level of group conscience, if any, discussed the proposed agenda item? Make it clear who is submitting the item (an individual, group, district,</p>
<p><i>Note: While all items are received equally, experience has shown that ideas greatly benefit from the value of a broader group conscience. Consider if and with whom you would like to have a group conscience discussion on the proposed agenda item prior to submitting.</i></p>
<p><i>I am an individual member. My name is Kaila M..</i></p>
<p>(4) Provide background information that describes and supports the reasoning for the proposal. List background material(s) included with the proposal:</p>

When I first read the 2021 version of Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare, I thought, wow, finally. A step in the right direction. At last, racism is being defined as what is-a safety issue in AA. At last, AA members are being encouraged to honor each others safety, and to respect each other. And those of us who hold privilege are being encouraged to look at that, which, in my experience of doing this, has only enhanced my spiritual practice and my 12th step work.

At last, what BIPOC and LGBTQ members, and BIPOC and LGBTQ folks who have chosen to leave AA, have been saying for decades about AA is being taken seriously.

At last, simple ways of respecting, honoring and protecting genderqueer members like myself, such as asking about our pronouns, are being encouraged in AA.

It was a huge relief. It took us 86 years to get there.

And then in 2022, it was all erased.

The 2022 version of Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare's Participation and Inclusion section represents the gutting of all that was beautiful and meaningful about the 2021 versions Diversity and Inclusion section. It reads like a boring and reluctantly compliant labor law poster. The feeling I get from reading it is, "too bad we have to include everybody nowadays". The 2022 version itself is evidence that, if AAs dont make an effort to examine our privilege, we are sure to accidentally cause harm with it. The section on Participation and Inclusion contains the glaringly gender non-inclusive term, "brotherly". The most marginalized folks are not even mentioned, or are hardly mentioned in it. Its a joke, its an insult, and it is a huge step backwards in terms of addressing AJLI's lack of racial diversity.

Lets not fool ourselves about values, as Bill W said.

Lets return the 2021 version of the Diversity and Inclusion section to Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare.

(5) What are the intended/expected outcomes if this proposed item is approved?

Members feeling and being safer in AA
Less racism in AA
Less transphobia in AA
More unity in AA
AA reaching a wider audience, appealing to more alcoholics

(6) Provide a primary contact for the submission.

Kaila M.

(7) Final comments:

Submit completed forms to the GSO Staff Member on the Conference Desk:

EMAIL: Conference@aa.org

POSTAL MAIL: Attn: Conference Desk

General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

Updated 5122

(1) Submit a clear and concisely worded motion. **We motion that the 2021 edition of Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare be brought back to replace the 2022 edition.**

(2) What problem does this proposed item address?

The safety issues in AA. The 2021 edition comes out stronger against racism and the lack of gender inclusivity in AA, so we want it back. Implementing it will make AA more inclusive and safer for all. We feel that the 2022 edition doesn't do enough to condemn discrimination in our rooms.

(3) What level of group conscience, if any, discussed the proposed agenda item? Make it clear who is submitting the item (an individual, group, district, area, etc.).

Note: While all items are received equally, experience has shown that ideas greatly benefit from the value of a broader group conscience. Consider if and with whom you would like to have a group conscience discussion on the proposed agenda item prior to submitting.

The New York Daily Reprieve Group, #11190 East Village, which meets on Monday and Thursday nights on Zoom, formerly at the Sheen Center at 18 Bleecker Street, Ny, NY, decided by group conscience to submit this motion.

(4) Provide background information that describes and supports the reasoning for the proposal. List background material(s) included with the proposal:

We try our best to be safe and inclusive at Daily Reprieve, but we have had problems with Zoom bombers who often say racist things attacking BIPOC, women and LGBT individuals especially. We have a lot of newcomers, and we want to make sure that they know that's not what AA is about-so we need a strong anti-discrimination statement we can point to. We have also in the past had some people come to our meeting and try to use Tradition 10 to shut people down in a way that's racist. So we see the problems and we want the help of GSO to solve them.

(5) What are the intended/expected outcomes if this proposed item is approved?

AA will be a safer and more inclusive place-and where there are problems, those of us who do service will have something strong and solid in writing from GSO to help us keep AA safe and inclusive

(6) Provide a primary contact for the submission.

Sarah K, Zoom Host d

(7) Final comments:

Thank you for all your great good service!

Submit completed forms to the GSO Staff Member on the Conference Desk:

EMAIL:

Conference@aa.org

POSTAL MAIL: Attn:

Conference Desk

General Service Office

P.O. Box 459

Grand Central Station New York, NY 10163

Updated 5/22

(1) Submit a clear and concisely worded motion.

We want a new Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare brochure that uses some of the wording and concepts from the 2021 brochure regarding race and gender.

(2) What problem does this proposed item address?

It addresses the toxic white supremacist culture that dominates AA and that expresses itself in racism, homophobia and gender discrimination. It provides service that is a necessary recourse against this toxic culture. It addresses newcomers feeling unwelcome or unsafe and leaving AA.

(3) What level of group conscience, if any, discussed the proposed agenda item? Make it clear who is submitting the item (an individual, group, district, area, etc.).

Note: While all items are received equally, experience has shown that ideas greatly benefit from the value of a broader group conscience. Consider if and with whom you would like to have a group conscience discussion on the proposed agenda item prior to submitting.

This is submitted by the AA group SF Daily Reprieve. We voted in our business meeting to submit this.

(4) Provide background information that describes and supports the reasoning for the proposal. List background material(s) included with the proposal:

We did a side-by-side comparison of the 2021 and 2022 Safety and AA: Our Common Welfare brochures. We overwhelmingly felt that the earlier one was much more effective in its wording. As Angela Davis said “in a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist”. Unfortunately, our AA society, while a very healing society for many people, is also a racist society. This “more was revealed” to us when in 2020, as the movement for Black lives was happening outside the doors, some of us began looking within and we found white supremacist thought and action-and the justification of it by AA as a whole through its denial of it and its refusal to stand up to it-all over AA. We have seen it in our own group here. We did take a group inventory on it, as suggested in the 2022 brochure-but that is not enough. We also looked at our own privilege, as suggested in the 2021 brochure, and tried to see beyond it in rewriting our meeting format to be anti-racist and represent AA as the inclusive place it should be. The other suggestions we would like to see re-published from the 2021 brochure is the encouragement to use people’s preferred pronouns (this is common courtesy but the white supremacist culture in AA dictates that it is rarely followed) and the definition of racism in AA as a safety issue. This last thing puts racism inside AA as an inside, rather than an outside issue, the myth that is so often claimed by racist individuals who misinterpret the 12 traditions and try to push their “One Right Way” (<https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>) on new people who are just trying to stay sober and share about what’s happening in their lives.

We must be anti-racist in our service material on safety in AA because being non-racist is just ignoring and denying the racism that is alive and well in AA, and to allow it to continue is irresponsible and racist.

(5) What are the intended/expected outcomes if this proposed item is approved?

Our group and many others will feel that GSO has our back in keeping our groups safe. There will be more love and inclusivity in AA, more unity without conformity. The traditions will be fulfilled. AA will be a safer and more attractive place for Black and Brown people, women, and those in the gay, lesbian and trans communities and our demographics will shift to include all who suffer from alcoholism, as our third tradition proposes.

(6) Provide a primary contact for the submission.

Lindsey
Group co-secretary

(7) Final comments: Thank you for listening and for your service! With love!

PAI-75

1

(1) Submit a clear and concisely worded motion.

The Know Good Group of AA would like to make a motion that GSO bring back the 2021 version of SMF-209, or create a new pamphlet on safety as close to it as possible. The 2022 version is too big a departure, we feel.

(2) What problem does this proposed item address?

It addresses the problem of safety in AA meetings, specifically that of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), women, femmes and other non-cis-male individuals, and members of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Intersex, Two-Spirit Plus (GLBTQA2S+) community.

(3) What level of group conscience, if any, discussed the proposed agenda item? Make it clear who is submitting the item (an individual, group, district, area, etc.).

Note: While all items are received equally, experience has shown that ideas greatly benefit from the value of a broader group conscience. Consider if and with whom you would like to have a group conscience discussion on the proposed agenda item prior to submitting.

This agenda item is being proposed by the Know Good Group of Alcoholics Anonymous of Davis, CA as decided by group conscience

(4) Provide background information that describes and supports the reasoning for the proposal. List background material(s) included with the proposal:

We feel that the 2021 version of the pamphlet goes to the needed lengths to ensure safety for all in AA, whereas the later version falls short of this. For example, the 2021 version brings in AA's third Tradition, when it says "Membership does not include having to tolerate racism". This is a strong and needed connection to make, because we have more often, unfortunately, seen in actual practice in AA meetings, the words (without the Spirit) of the third Tradition being used to justify someone's racist behavior.

Indeed every alcoholic is welcome in AA, but racist behaviors that are unwelcoming and unsafe are not welcome, and we feel that needs to be said-by GSO and in written form.

The pamphlet from 2021 also deals directly with the very real problem of the 10th Tradition (or select parts of the 10th Tradition) being weaponized against BIPOC sharing honestly in meetings. Anyone who has ever read the 10th Tradition will know that it is speaking about AA itself not involving itself in outside controversy, and not what individual members share about their lives without speaking for AA as a whole. But AA members seem to not know this, or seem to forget this when race is concerned, and some members think they should take upon themselves to police BIPOC's shares. This unfortunately happens often enough that this safety issue, too, needs to be directly confronted in writing by GSO.

We feel that racism in AA is a safety issue, as stated in the earlier, but not the later, version of this service material. We would also like to see that come back out in writing by GSO. Racism in AA is a safety issue on both the level that BIPOC members are often made to feel unsafe to fully express themselves in meetings and in some cases are actually the victims of racial slurs and threats, and on the level that alcoholism is a safety issue and if the place that can provide a solution to alcoholism isn't welcoming to all alcoholics (in practice as well as in theory), we are leaving some alcoholics to the dangers of their alcoholism.

We feel that the parts from the 2021 version around respecting the pronouns of all AA members is necessary and should never have been removed from this service material.

The suggestions for individuals to look at their privilege, and for groups to ask "who's not in the room" and why, are helpful and necessary. This should help prevent the selfish apathy about group safety from occurring as often in the future as it does currently, among members of privileged groups such as cis-men, or white folks, who make up the vast majority of who's in the room. Why do they?

2

(5) What are the intended/expected outcomes if this proposed item is approved?

More and deeper (and more informed) conversations around race especially and safety in AA, leading ultimately to safer, more inclusive meetings.

(6) Provide a primary contact for the submission.

group secretary

(7) Final comments:

Thank you for reading this, thank you for your service and please don't hesitate to contact me with questions or comments.

Service Material from the General Service Office

Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare

Safety is an important issue within A.A. — one that all groups and members can address to develop workable solutions to help keep our meetings safe based on the fundamental principles of the Fellowship.

“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)

“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.” — Tradition One (Short Form)

“Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose — that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” — Tradition Five (Long Form)

A.A. and Safety

Alcoholics Anonymous is a microcosm of the larger society within which we live. Problems found in the world can also make their way into A.A. As we strive to share in a safe environment, alcoholics can focus on maintaining sobriety and the group can fulfill its primary purpose — to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

There is no government within A.A. and no central authority to control or direct its members, but we do share the experience of groups and members in applying A.A. principles to issues that have arisen. As expressed in Tradition Two and Tradition Nine, it is through an informed group conscience that individual members and A.A. groups find solutions to group matters as they relate to safety. Service entities such as areas, districts and intergroup/central offices are available to help provide A.A. services and shared experiences.

Group Safety and Unity

Situations that groups have addressed through their group conscience include threats of violence, bullying, sexual harassment or stalking; financial coercion; racial discrimination, sexual orientation, or gender intolerance; and feeling pressured to adopt a particular point of view relating to medical treatments and/or medications. Keep in mind there may be experiences/harassments that originate from group interactions but that go on outside of typical meeting times; these experiences can affect whether someone feels safe to return to the group.

Guidelines for handling difficult situations can be discussed at meetings and determined by the

group conscience. In these group discussions, the focus is on creating an environment where members can share safely and find and maintain sobriety. In any situation, if a person's safety is in jeopardy or the situation breaches the law, the individuals involved can take appropriate action to ensure their safety. Calling the proper authorities does not go against any A.A. Traditions. Anonymity is not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behavior.

Dealing with Disruptions

While most groups operate with a healthy balance of spontaneity and structure, others have experienced situations that can threaten group unity and challenge the safety of the group and its members. One such situation is a disruptive person whose behavior inhibits the group's ability to carry out its primary purpose. Members exhibiting such disruptive behavior may be asked by the group to stop attending that particular meeting for a period of time. In-person and virtual groups dealing with these kinds of disruptions make such a request to preserve the common welfare of the group and to maintain A.A. unity, recognizing that no A.A. group can bar any individual from equal membership in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Some groups have developed plans for addressing disruptive behavior and have established procedures through their group conscience to ensure that the group's welfare is protected. In many cases, disruptive behavior is preempted by having the chairperson state some reasonable expectations for the functioning of the group. Some groups include in their opening announcements that disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. For clarity, some groups have listed examples of the group's definition of these behaviors. When necessary, groups and members always have the option to call the appropriate authorities if disruptive behavior escalates to violence or harassment, or if someone's safety is at risk.

A.A. and the Law

Common sense and experience suggest that A.A. membership does not grant immunity from the law or local regulations and that being at an A.A. meeting does not put anyone beyond the jurisdiction of law enforcement. As individuals, A.A. members are also "citizens of the world," and as citizens we are not above the law.

Any activity within an A.A. group's meeting is subject to the same laws and local regulations that apply outside the group's meeting. Through the group conscience process, many groups have established guidelines regarding when it may be appropriate to call authorities to handle a given situation. Situations that groups have faced include, but are not limited to, violence, embezzlement, theft of property, drug sales at a meeting, and more. However, neither the list of possible situations nor the guidelines are meant to cover every scenario. While A.A. members and groups can be caring and supportive to those affected, we are not professionals trained to handle such situations. Law enforcement or other professional help may be necessary. Members should contact the authorities if they feel that their safety is at risk.

Emergencies

Injuries, accidents, fires, etc., sometimes do occur during meetings. To accommodate such situations, groups have developed plans and procedures, often in consultation with landlords, local authorities and/or professionals. Members should not hesitate to call emergency personnel in critical situations; for example, if an individual is threatening self-harm. Addressing an emergency is more important than continuing the meeting.

In recent years, a global health situation affected A.A. groups meeting in person. Although many groups have responded by meeting virtually, groups opting to meet in person found it helpful to obtain the most complete and reliable information possible from qualified medical personnel and/or public health and safety agencies. Some groups have used A.A.'s Twelve Traditions as the basis for creating unity within the group and developing group safety guidelines. Attendance at A.A. meetings should not require putting one's health at risk or being intimidated for adhering to local safety guidance. By respecting the local laws and safety guidelines, many groups stayed focused on our primary purpose and avoided drawing A.A. into public controversy.

Safety and A.A. in the Digital Age

Virtual platforms and social media have become a significant resource for connecting current A.A. members and potential members in ways the Fellowship never thought possible. The A.A. Traditions that apply to in-person A.A. settings also apply to A.A. phone, online and social media settings. Many groups discuss the relationship between safety and anonymity and incorporate guidelines in their opening announcements. To help keep meetings free from cyberbullying or harassment, some virtual groups have created specific service positions. Virtual A.A. groups that have experienced harassment from Internet "trolls" have adjusted the group's security settings, created safety procedures and/or sought professional technical support. Some local intergroup/central offices, districts, areas, and forums have developed tech support and safety service material to share with members.

Participation and Inclusion

A.A.'s Steps, Traditions and Concepts encourage participation, inclusion, and unity. These spiritual principles serve as the ideals A.A. groups and members strive for.

In the Step Five essay in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, A.A.'s co-founder Bill W. wrote, "...nearly all of us suffered the feeling that we didn't quite belong.... When we reached A.A., and for the first time in our lives stood among people who seemed to understand, the sense of belonging was tremendously exciting."

As part of a Grapevine article on Tradition Three Bill W. shared "Let us of A.A. therefore resolve that we shall always be inclusive, and never exclusive, offering all we have to all.... May all barriers be thus leveled; may our unity thus be preserved."

The Concept Four essay in *The A.A. Service Manual* states, "There is another good reason for 'participation,' and this one has to do with our spiritual needs. All of us deeply desire to belong. We want an A.A. relation of brotherly partnership. It is our shining ideal that the 'spiritual

corporation' of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as 'second class.'"

These may be the ideals, but they are not always everyone's experience. Some A.A. members have shared they felt unwelcome in A.A. meetings based on their race, ethnicity, religious belief or non-belief, native language, age or varying abilities. Some members have shared that being questioned about their gender identity has made them feel unaccepted. Others have shared they have not been invited to fully participate in the group or fully participate in A.A.

Our Traditions suggest that no one should have to tolerate racial, sexual orientation, gender, age or other discrimination when they seek help from A.A.

What is the connection to safety? These experiences impact members feeling safe and wanting to stay in A.A. Here is some experience that A.A. groups have shared on how they practice these principles to support a safe meeting space:

Groups have used the inventory process to address barriers to full participation, asking questions such as:

- Are we striving to provide a safe and accessible meeting space?
- Could we be providing language interpretation, including ASL, to be more accessible to all alcoholics?
- Are we striving to attract a good cross section of alcoholics in our local community?
- Are all members given the opportunity to speak at meetings and to participate in other group activities?

Alcoholism is a disease that is no respecter of age, varying abilities, creed, race, gender, wealth, occupation, or education. Our experience seems to show that anyone can be an alcoholic. And, beyond question, anyone who wants to stop drinking is welcome in A.A.

"...we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code." — *Alcoholics Anonymous, page 84*

Here are some helpful suggestions and reminders:

- Talk about issues of safety before they arise, at the group, district, or area level.
- Use your group's [General Service Representative](#) (G.S.R.) and [A.A. Service Committees](#) to help provide broader shared experience.
- Include the topic of safety as part of your group inventory and consider developing group guidelines and procedures on safety.
- Keep the focus on our primary purpose and our common welfare, and place principles before personalities in all discussions about safety.

- Remember that sponsors can play an important role in providing leadership and setting an example.
- Let A.A. members know that if they are concerned about the words or actions of another member, they may find it helpful to speak to someone they trust, their A.A. group, or a professional.
- Remember that calling the proper authorities in relation to criminal behavior taking place at or around meetings does not go against any A.A. Traditions and that anonymity is not a cloak protecting such behavior.

Helpful Resources

- [Box 4-5-9, October 2010 edition](#), articles on “Disruptive Members at A.A. Meetings” and “A.A. and the Law” (available on the newsletters page at aa.org).
- A report from the 62nd General Service Conference Workshop: “*Safety in A.A.: Our Common Welfare*”*
- Final Report of the “*Ad Hoc Committee on Group Safety of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, U.S. and Canada*” (Feb. 2, 2014)*
- [2019 Regional Forum Reports](#) “Who’s Not in the Room — Fostering Participation in A.A.”**
- A.A. pamphlet [“Questions & Answers on Sponsorship”](#)***
- A.A. pamphlet [“The A.A. Group ... Where it All Begins”](#)***
- A.A. pamphlet [“The A.A. Member — Medications and Other Drugs”](#)***
- A.A. pamphlet [“Understanding Anonymity”](#)***
- A.A. Guidelines [“Accessibility for All Alcoholics”](#)
- Service Material [“Safety Card for A.A. Groups”](#)***
- Service Material [“Safety and A.A. Flyer”](#)***
- Contact your district committee member (D.C.M.) or area delegate for local shared expertise.

*Available upon request by contacting G.S.O.

**Available on aa.org.

www.aa.org

SMF-209

Rev: 4/22

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Service Material from the General Service Office

Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare

Safety is an important issue within A.A. — one that all groups and members can address to develop workable solutions to help keep our meetings safe based on the fundamental principles of the Fellowship.

“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)

“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.” — Tradition One (Short Form)

“Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose — that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” — Tradition Five (Long Form)

A.A. groups, whether they meet in person or on virtual platforms, are spiritual entities made up of alcoholics who gather for the sole purpose of staying sober and helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a microcosm of the larger society within which we live. Problems found in the world can also make their way into A.A. As we strive to share in a spirit of trust — both at meetings and individually with sponsors, friends and new acquaintances — it is reasonable for each member to expect a meaningful level of safety. By providing a safe environment *in which alcoholics can focus on gaining and maintaining sobriety*, the group can fulfill its primary purpose — to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Autonomy and Group Action

Because A.A., as such, ought never be organized, as indicated in Tradition Nine, it is individual members and groups who ensure that all members feel as safe as possible in A.A.

As embodied in the Fourth Tradition, the formation and operation of an A.A. group resides with the group conscience of its members. It is through an informed group conscience that A.A. groups find their solutions to group problems. Service entities such as areas, districts and inter-group/central offices are available to help provide *A.A. services and shared experience*. All groups and entities in A.A. are autonomous. There is no government within A.A. and no central authority to control or direct its members, but we do share the experience of groups and members in applying A.A. principles to issues that have arisen.

Recognizing that safety is an issue of importance to members, many groups have created “guideposts” to keep distractions and disruptions to a minimum within the context of the group.

A.A. Membership

A.A.’s Third Tradition states that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. This brings an openness that helps to define our membership as a diverse Fellowship of alcoholics, yet it also requires us to be mindful of our group and individual safety. Though disruptions are rare, such a disruptive person may be asked to leave an A.A. meeting space, if the disruptive behavior inhibits the group’s ability to carry out its primary purpose.

No A.A. entity proposes to bar any individual from membership in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Dealing with Disruptions

While most groups operate with a healthy balance of spontaneity and structure, there are a number of situations that can threaten group unity and challenge the safety of the group and its members. Often this can center on disruptive individuals or those who are confrontational or aggressive. Such behavior can take over a meeting and frighten new and longtime members. Though typically as a last resort, groups and members always have the option to call the appropriate authorities if disruptive behavior continues or if anyone’s safety is at risk.

Disruptive members may be asked to stop attending the meeting for a period of time. In-person and virtual groups that take this drastic action do so in order to preserve the common welfare of the group and to maintain A.A. unity.

Some groups have developed plans for addressing disruptive behavior and have established procedures through their group conscience to ensure that the group’s welfare is protected. In many cases, disruptive behavior is preempted by having the chairperson state some reasonable expectations for the functioning of the group.

Some groups include in their opening announcements that illegal, disruptive behavior and hate speech are not tolerated. For clarity, some groups have listed examples of the group's definition of disruptive behavior.

Safety and A.A. in the Digital Age

The Internet and social media platforms have greatly impacted how A.A. members are able to interact with each other and with potential members. The principles that apply to in-person A.A. settings also apply to A.A. phone, online and social media settings. Some virtual A.A. groups that have experienced harassment from Internet "trolls" have adjusted the group's security settings, created safety procedures and/or sought professional technical support. Some local central/intergroup offices, districts, areas and forums have also developed tech support and safety service material to share with members.

Keeping in mind A.A. Traditions, the Fellowship finds that social media has become a significant resource to connect with fellow members and potential members in ways we never thought possible. It is also important to keep in mind that someone's first impression of Alcoholics Anonymous may occur on a virtual platform where A.A. members — and potential members — mix.

Group Safety and Unity

Situations that groups have addressed through their group conscience include sexual harassment or stalking; threats of violence; bullying; financial coercion; racial discrimination, sexual orientation or gender intolerance; and feeling pressured to adopt a particular point of view or belief relating to medical treatments and/or medications, politics, religion, or other issues.

Guidelines for handling difficult situations can be discussed at meetings and determined by the group conscience. A.A. members can speak to those who are acting inappropriately.

Targets of inappropriate behavior, harassment or sexual or financial predation can let the group know about such situations directly or, if not directly, then perhaps through a sponsor or trusted friend. This way the group is informed, and members can help address the situation and curtail further problems. In these group discussions, the focus is on creating an environment where all alcoholics can find and maintain sobriety.

Unsafe or predatory behavior, such as unwanted sexual attention or targeting vulnerable members, can be especially troublesome. Also, keep in mind there may be experiences/harassments

that originate from group interactions but that go on outside of typical meeting times; these experiences can affect whether someone feels safe to return to the group.

Investments, loans, employment and/or any services offered in exchange for any fees is outside of the purpose of an A.A. group. If these activities do occur, all parties involved should clearly understand that these activities take place outside of A.A.

In any situation, if a person's safety is in jeopardy or the situation breaches the law, the individuals involved can take appropriate action to ensure their safety. Calling the proper authorities does not go against any A.A. Traditions. *Anonymity is not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behavior.*

A.A. and the Law

Common sense and experience suggest that A.A. membership does not grant immunity from local regulations and that being at an A.A. meeting does not put anyone beyond the jurisdiction of law enforcement officers. As individuals, A.A. members are also "citizens of the world," and as citizens we are not above the law.

Through the group conscience process, many groups have established guidelines regarding when it may be appropriate to call authorities and handle a given situation within the legal system. No A.A. group has to tolerate illegal behavior, and any activity within an A.A. meeting is subject to the same laws that apply outside the meeting. The nature of illegal acts that groups have faced include violence, embezzlement, theft of property, drug sales at a meeting, and more. While A.A. members and groups can be caring and supportive to those affected, we are not professionals trained to handle such situations. Law enforcement or other professional help may be necessary.

Emergencies

Injuries, accidents, fires, etc., sometimes do occur during meetings. To accommodate such situations, groups have developed plans and procedures, often in consultation with landlords, local authorities and/or professionals. Members should not hesitate to call emergency personnel in critical situations. Addressing an emergency situation is more important than continuing the meeting.

Recently, a global health situation has affected groups' abilities to meet in person. Many groups have responded by meeting online, and if meeting in person, they follow local health guidelines and laws. It is suggested that groups and members with health and safety questions contact national, state/provincial and local health authorities for appropriate information.

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From our shared experience, groups and members who have not adhered to local safety guidelines regarding the pandemic have at times not only affected how A.A. as a whole is viewed by the general public (at times through media news stories) but have potentially put people's physical and mental health in jeopardy. Attendance at A.A. meetings should not require putting one's health at risk or being intimidated for wearing a mask or other taking other precautions (not holding hands, social distancing, etc.).

Some groups have set up contact lists with group members and alerted local A.A. entities if they are no longer meeting in person. When a group transfers to meet on virtual platforms, that information can also be shared with local A.A. entities so that the A.A. message will remain available to those seeking help with a drinking problem.

In addition, local A.A. committees can inform local professionals about "open" virtual meetings, which can be a helpful A.A. resource for their alcoholic clients. Local Public Information committees can also be helpful in providing up-to-date information about A.A. to local media.

Keeping the Focus on Our Primary Purpose

It is hoped that our common suffering as alcoholics and our common solution in A.A. would transcend most issues and curtail negative behaviors.

Safety is important to the functioning of the group. By maintaining safety in meetings, the group as a whole will benefit, and members will be able to focus on recovery from alcoholism and a life of sobriety. Ultimately, the experience of how these situations are handled can be as varied as the members in our Fellowship. Good judgment and common sense, informed by the Twelve Traditions, seem to provide the best guide.

Each group is as unique as a thumbprint, and approaches to carrying the message of sobriety vary not just from group to group. Acting autonomously, each group charts its own course. The better informed the members, the stronger and more cohesive the group — and the greater the assurance that when a newcomer reaches out for help, the hand of A.A. always will be there.

Diversity and Inclusion

Keeping in the spirit of Tradition Three, A.A. celebrates its members by raising awareness of inclusion and respecting members with varying abilities, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, gender identities, religions, languages, neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds and ages. As

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a Fellowship, we strive to support the well-being of members as we evolve toward greater diversity, equity and inclusivity.

Race and privilege have been a topic of discussion as they relate to the spirit of Tradition Three, among members of local A.A. entities as well as members of A.A.'s corporate boards, including the General Service Board. And particularly in light of this moment in time, when societal divisions and inequities along racial lines have been laid bare — some members are discussing this complex issue in tandem with A.A. Traditions — and recognize the need to look at our own disparities. Some members, who are people of color, have shared concerns that their life experiences as it relates to being an alcoholic person of color in A.A., have been viewed as an “outside issue” and therefore have felt unsafe in what they can and cannot share about their own experience. Membership does not include having to tolerate racism in A.A. or removing this life experience from one’s story.

Many groups have found that providing a safe space to share this experience to be no more in contradiction of Tradition Ten (an “outside issue”) than the topic of safety and A.A. itself.

Racism in A.A. is a safety issue.

Acknowledging that we all operate within some unearned privilege is key in understanding and acting upon where we can widen the circle of an accessible message and a feeling of inclusion. For example, if one can acknowledge that they have an unearned privilege over a non-native English speaker or a member who is d/Deaf, then one can better reflect on how to ensure that all have equal access to our life-saving message.

While many members — including members who are transgender — identify as either male or female, some members do not identify within these two categories. People whose gender is not female or male often identify as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer or genderfluid, among others. Keeping in mind Tradition Ten, a person is the gender they say they are. A.A. neither dictates nor has an opinion on any person’s gender or gender pronouns.

A.A. membership is open to all genders and backgrounds. No matter one’s gender identity, some members have shared that they find it helpful to have a safe space to voluntarily share their pronouns with other members of the group, in order to help the group get to know them better. Some members have shared that they voluntarily share their pronouns at in-person or online meetings so that *others* may feel more comfortable, if they care to do so. Some members have also shared that being questioned about their gender identification has made them feel unsafe.

Here are examples of just some of the pronouns of A.A. members in our Fellowship: they/them/theirs; she/her/hers; and he/him/his.

Most alcoholics feel quite comfortable in any A.A. group. Yet, many A.A. communities also have “special interest” meetings where it may be easier to be open about certain personal issues. Some A.A.s come together as specialized A.A. groups — for “young” people; women, men, and nonbinary; medical or legal professionals; LGBTQ+; BIPOC; and others. If the members are all alcoholics, and if they open the door to all alcoholics who seek help — regardless of profession, gender or other distinction — and meet all the other aspects defining an A.A. group, they may call themselves an A.A. group.

We in A.A. believe alcoholism is a disease that is no respecter of age, varying abilities, gender, creed, race, wealth, occupation or education. Our experience seems to show that anyone can be an alcoholic. And, beyond question, anyone who wants to stop drinking is welcome in A.A.

What Can Groups and Members Do?

Groups and members can discuss the topic of safety to raise awareness in the Fellowship, and they can seek through sponsorship, workshops and meetings to create as safe an environment as possible for the newcomer, other members and potential members. This can be the subject of sharing among groups at the district or area level.

Be mindful of who’s *not* in the room, and then widen the conversation as to *why*. What actions can we take so that A.A. is here for all who seek help with a drinking problem and who want to receive A.A.’s program of recovery? How can we widen participation in all forms of service?

Here are some helpful suggestions and reminders:

- Talk about issues of safety before they arise. Communicate clearly what A.A. is and what it is not.
- Raise awareness: Every member attending an A.A. meeting can be mindful of safety.
- Remember that sponsorship plays an important role, and sponsors can be helpful in pointing out warning signs or unhealthy situations to sponsees and newcomers.
- Let A.A. members know that if they are concerned about the words or actions of a sponsor or other member, they may find it helpful to speak to someone they trust, their A.A. group, or a professional.

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- Include safety as part of your group inventory and consider developing group guidelines and procedures on safety.
- In all discussions about safety, keep the focus on our primary purpose and our common welfare, and place principles before personalities.
- Connect with your group's [General Service Representative](#) (G.S.R.) and [A.A. Service Committees](#) to help provide broader shared experience.

Helpful Resources for A.A. Members and Groups

- [Box 4-5-9, October 2010 edition](#), articles on “Disruptive Members at A.A. Meetings” and “A.A. and the Law” (available on the newsletters page at aa.org).
- A report from the 62nd General Service Conference Workshop: “*Safety in A.A.: Our Common Welfare*”*
- Final Report of the “*Ad Hoc Committee on Group Safety of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, U.S. and Canada*” (Feb. 2, 2014)*
- 2019 Regional Forum [Reports](#) “Who’s Not in the Room — Fostering Participation in A.A.”**
- A.A. pamphlet “[Questions & Answers on Sponsorship](#).”***
- A.A. pamphlet “[The A.A. Group ... Where it All Begins](#)”**
- A.A. pamphlet “[The A.A. Member — Medications and Other Drugs](#)”**
- A.A. pamphlet “[Understanding Anonymity](#)”**
- A.A. Guidelines “[Accessibility for All Alcoholics](#)”
- Service Material “[Safety Card for A.A. Groups](#)”***
- Service Material “[Safety and A.A. Flyer](#)”***
- Contact your district committee member (D.C.M.) or area delegate for local shared experience.

*Available upon request by contacting G.S.O.

**Available on aa.org.

Service Material from the General Service Office**SAFETY AND A.A.: OUR COMMON WELFARE**

Safety is an important issue within A.A. – one that all groups and members can address to develop workable solutions and help keep our meetings safe based on the fundamental principles of the Fellowship.

“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)

A.A. groups are spiritual entities made up of alcoholics who gather for the sole purpose of staying sober and helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. Yet, we are not immune to the difficulties that affect the rest of humanity.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a microcosm of the larger society within which we exist. Problems found in the outside world can also make their way into the rooms of A.A. As we strive to share in a spirit of trust, both at meetings and individually with sponsors and friends, it is reasonable for each member to expect a meaningful level of safety. Those attending A.A. meetings derive a benefit by providing a safe environment in which alcoholics can focus on gaining and maintaining sobriety. The group can then fulfill its primary purpose – to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. For this reason, groups and members discuss the topic of safety.

Autonomy and Group Action

Because A.A., as such, ought never be organized, as indicated in Tradition Nine, it is individual members and groups who ensure that all members feel as safe as possible in A.A.

There is no government within A.A. and no central authority, legal or otherwise, to control or direct the behavior of A.A. members. As embodied in the Fourth Tradition, the formation and operation of an A.A. Group resides with the group conscience of its members. A.A. groups and service entities such as areas, districts, intergroup/central offices are autonomous.

Recognizing that safety is an issue of importance to its members, many groups have taken actions to keep distractions and disruptions to a minimum within the context of the group.

A.A. Membership

A.A. membership has never been contingent on any set of behavioral or moral standards – beyond those founded on common sense, courtesy, and the timeless values of kindness, tolerance and love.

A.A.'s Third Tradition states that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. This brings an openness that helps to define our character as a diverse Fellowship; yet it also requires us to be mindful of our group and individual safety.

Some people, however, come into A.A. without an understanding of the type of behavior that is appropriate in meetings or in the company of other members. A person can be sober in A.A., yet still not understand what is acceptable.

Dealing with Disruptions

While most groups operate with a healthy balance of spontaneity and structure, there are a number of situations that can threaten group unity and challenge the safety of the group and its members. Often this can center on disruptive individuals, those who are confrontational, aggressive, or those who are simply unwilling to put the needs of the group first. Such behavior can hijack the focus of a meeting and frighten members, new and old.

Some groups have developed plans for addressing disruptive behavior and have established procedures through their group conscience to ensure that the group's welfare is protected. In many cases, disruptive behavior is pre-empted by having the chairperson state the expectations for behavior in the meeting.

Some groups include in their opening announcements that illegal and disruptive behavior is not tolerated. Still other groups have asked disruptive members to leave the meeting. Additionally, groups and members always have the option to call the appropriate authorities if disruptive behavior continues or anyone's safety is at risk.

Group Safety and Unity

Situations that groups have addressed through their group conscience include, sexual harassment or stalking; threats of violence; bullying; financial coercion; racial or lifestyle intolerance; pressuring A.A. members into a particular point of view or belief relating to medical treatments and/or medications, politics, religion, or other outside issues. In addition, there may be other behaviors that go on outside of typical meeting times that may affect whether someone feels safe to return to the group.

Some groups have their own guidelines or procedures to help keep the meeting safe. A.A. members can speak to those who are acting inappropriately. Situations can be discussed at business meetings to come to a group conscience about how to handle a situation. As a last resort, the disruptive member may be asked to stop attending the

meeting for a specific period of time. Groups that take this drastic action do it in order to preserve the common welfare of the group and to maintain A.A. unity.

In any situation, if a person's safety is in jeopardy, or the situation breaches the law, the individuals involved can take appropriate action to ensure their safety. Calling the proper authorities does not go against any A.A. Traditions. *Anonymity is not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behavior.*

Inappropriate or predatory behavior, such as unwanted sexual attention or targeting vulnerable members can be especially troublesome. These behaviors may go on outside of typical meeting times. While A.A. members can be caring and supportive to those affected, we are not professionals trained to handle such situations. Law enforcement or other professional help may be necessary.

Victims of inappropriate behavior, harassment or predators can let the group know about such situations, often through a sponsor or trusted friend. This way the group is informed, and members can help address the situation and curtail further problems. Group discussion should be focused on creating an environment where all alcoholics can find and maintain sobriety.

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Common sense and experience suggest that A.A. membership does not grant immunity from local regulations and being at an A.A. meeting does not put anyone beyond the jurisdiction of law enforcement officers. As individuals, A.A. members are also "citizens of the world," and as citizens we are not above the law.

Through the group conscience process, many groups have established guidelines regarding when it may be appropriate to call authorities and handle a given situation within the legal system. No A.A. group has to tolerate illegal behavior and any activity within an A.A. meeting is subject to the same laws that apply outside the meeting. The nature of illegal acts that groups have faced include violence, embezzlement, theft of property, drug sales at a meeting, and more.

Emergencies

Injuries, accidents, fires, etc., sometimes do occur during meetings. To accommodate these situations, groups can also develop plans and procedures, often in consultation with their landlord or local authorities. Addressing an emergency situation is more important than continuing the meeting, and members should not hesitate to call emergency personnel in critical situations.

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Safety, however, is important to the functioning of the group. By maintaining order and safety in meetings, the group as a whole will benefit and members will be able to focus on recovery from alcoholism and a life of sobriety.

Ultimately, the experience of how these situations are handled can be as varied as our Fellowship. Good judgment and common sense, informed by the Twelve Traditions, seem to provide the best guide.

What Can Groups and Members Do?

Groups and members can discuss the topic of safety, to raise awareness in the Fellowship and seek through sponsorship, workshops and meetings, to create as safe an environment as possible for the newcomer, and other members or potential members. This can be the subject of sharing among groups at the district or area level.

Here are some helpful suggestions and reminders:

- Talk about issues of safety before they arise.
- Safety is something each member attending an A.A. meeting can be mindful of.
- Communicate clearly what A.A. is and what it is not.
- Sponsorship plays an important role and sponsors can be helpful in pointing out warning signs or unhealthy situations to sponsees and newcomers.
- A.A. members who are concerned about the words or actions of a sponsor or other member, may find it helpful to speak to someone they trust, their A.A. group, or a professional, as needed.
- Include Safety and the A.A. Meeting Environment as topics for a group inventory.
- Consider developing group guidelines and procedures on safety. Recommend that no one walk to a car alone but be accompanied by a trusted fellow or travel in a group.
- In all discussions about safety, keep the focus on our primary purpose, our common welfare, and place principles before personalities.

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