

H&I Volunteer Orientation

The purpose of this orientation is to acquaint all current and potential H&I volunteers with our relevant policies. It will provide basic training on what to expect when taking an A.A. meeting into a H&I facility, how to conduct yourself, and provide tips and suggestions on how to shape your message of recovery or your experience, strength and hope.

What is H&I

The purpose of the Hospitals & Institutions Committee is to carry our message of recovery to alcoholics who have limited access to regular meetings. Our core message is:

“ANY alcoholic can stop drinking, lose the desire to drink, and find a new way of life”

This is accomplished through A.A. meetings that visit facilities on a regular basis. These meetings are made up of a facility coordinator who assigns a volunteer to cover various days and/or times for taking meetings into the facility (per the Facility Management’s schedule). The person assigned for a specific meeting is the “Leader” who may or may not invite a speaker. We call these meetings “Presentations” to remind ourselves that they differ from regular A.A. meetings in several important ways.

H&I presentations simply introduce the basics of AA using various presentation formats.

In a speaker presentation, one or more A.A. members share their experience, strength, and hope that lays out some basic symptoms and characteristics of the disease and shows how A.A. has brought about recovery.

Literature presentations are meetings where a reading is done from the AA Big Book or another approved document. Usually, the leader begins reading a

paragraph or two, then each attendee picks up and reads a bit, going around the room. When each person is done reading, they say “pass”.

Topic meetings are started by the leader sharing about a specific topic and then allows other members to expound on the topic. It’s important to keep the discussion on topic.

NOTE:

Open sharing types of meetings are discouraged because they may lend themselves to an atmosphere which is inappropriate or unruly in an early recovery setting. It is Important that A.A. volunteers maintain control and a sense of calm throughout the presentation.

All H&I volunteers must have at least 1 year of continuous sobriety. Volunteers with less than a year may only attend H&I meetings with a mentor who has the required sobriety. It is not important whether or not we have been in a similar facility ourselves. Anyone with a clear and consistent Alcoholics Anonymous message, who is willing to share it, is well suited for H&I work.

All H&I presentations are closed to outside participation. AA members from the outside should attend the meeting only when invited by the leader.

At the end of the presentation, there is usually a question and answer period. Sometimes the residents will have questions about other treatment facilities, or other fellowships, about medications, or about their relationships with other people. It is important to remember that when doing H&I service, we carry only the “Alcoholics Anonymous Message of Recovery”. We have no opinions on anything else, especially not medications.

We may not be able to answer all of their questions, but we can always convey a feeling of acceptance and interest in the person who asked. That may be of greater service than mere information.

Types of Facilities

We do H&I work in several types of facilities. Each facility is different, with different policies and procedures. It is important that we respect the rules of the facilities we visit and always remember we are guests of the facility.

DETOX CENTERS (Withdrawal management)

Alcoholics in detox centers are in the earliest stage of recovery and patients may be on medication. These can be challenging meetings. Don't be offended if a patient falls asleep, leaves suddenly, or doesn't pay attention. Simply do your best, but NEVER accept abusive behavior! (Refer to important note, below). Your safety is of primary importance.

Some facilities provide interim care for addicts who are waiting to go to a treatment facility and the residents may therefore remain in the detox for a few weeks. Others are short term with a maximum stay of three to seven days.

TREATMENT CENTERS (Rehab)

Treatment centers help alcoholics recover after they have been through withdrawal. Treatment programs typically last 3 to 6 weeks but can be longer. These centers have different philosophies and approaches. Some strongly advocate 12-step fellowships, while others present 12-step fellowships as one of several options. Alcoholics in rehab typically must adhere to a strict program while they are in treatment. They sometimes have limited access to the outside world: for example, they may not be allowed to leave the facility and may be deprived of their cell phones.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH UNITS

Sometimes severe alcoholics exhibit behavior that can cause harm to themselves or others. They may be "Baker Acted" or detained by police. When taking meetings into these facilities it is extremely important to adhere to the policies of the facility. Often, we are not allowed to hold a meeting unless a trained staff-member is present at all times.

RESIDENTIAL CARE CENTERS (Nursing Homes)

Not all patients in these centers are there due to alcohol or drug abuse, but many are. We offer our message of recovery for those who choose to attend.

DETENTION CENTERS (Jails)

Detention Centers have additional requirements for H&I volunteers. Each jail has its own application process, back-ground check and orientation requirements. You will need to work with the H&I Coordinator for the jail you've chosen to work through the process before you will be allowed to enter the facility.

Because of the extra effort to become an H&I volunteer at the jail, it is preferable for the volunteer to be able to make a long term commitment.

How to do Service in H&I

H&I service is very rewarding and there are many ways to get involved. If you are interested in doing service at any level, the easiest way to get started is simply to attend the monthly H&I committee meeting held on the first Wednesday of every month at Central Office, 1748 Independence Blvd, Suite G-2, Sarasota, Florida which starts at 7 pm. (Please use the back door).

You can also visit the District 4 website at dist4gsaa.org. Scroll to the middle of the page and you will find a Help Wanted banner. If you click on the H&I link, you will see a complete listing of H&I facilities along with the addresses and meeting times. Find a time and place convenient to your needs, and call the A.A. Coordinator listed for that facility.

H&I COORDINATORS

Each facility has a person who is responsible for assigning volunteers to cover each of the A.A. meetings offered at their facility. They are also responsible for communicating with the staff at the Facility. Typically the Coordinator should have 3 years of sobriety and have taken meetings into a H&I facility for some time.

The Coordinator should consider the needs of the residents and communicate with volunteers about those needs. Many coordinators will assign various types of meetings for days of the week. For example, Mondays could be Big Book meetings. Tuesdays could be 12x12 step meetings, Wednesdays could be Daily Reflections meetings, Thursdays could be “Living Sober” meetings etc. Coordinators should work with the H&I Chair to secure the needed literature.

What to expect at the facility:

When your coordinator and you have agreed on a meeting assignment, it’s typically once a month, such as the second Tuesday of the month at a certain time (however it could be more frequent). That makes you the “Leader’ for that particular meeting. You are free to invite a speaker (or speakers) or choose the readings as assigned by the coordinator.

When you arrive at the facility, your coordinator will advise where to find a “A.A. Meeting Guide” (often kept at the front desk of the facility and you may need to ask for it). The meeting guide contains the format and various readings that will be handed out to willing participants.

The facility staff will most likely have made an announcement to the residents about the meeting and they will be gathered in a meeting room (Sometimes getting everyone gathered takes some time). When ready, we begin the meeting according to the meeting format. It’s best to keep the length of the meeting to an hour or less.

Important note:

If you feel threatened at any time or if a patient becomes abusive (verbally or physically), you should immediately remove yourself from the situation and seek help from the facility staff.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ALL AA VOLUNTEERS

When doing H&I service, we remember we represent A.A., so we must act so as never to tarnish AA's reputation. Please keep the following in mind:

Honor your commitment. Check with your sponsor before volunteering. Your sponsor can help you check your motives and expectations. Arrive on time.

Respect the role of the leader and/or Coordinator. Give the coordinator at least 48 hours notice if you need to cancel. Your help to find a replacement is appreciated.

Be aware of how you conduct yourself in the facility.

1. Avoid swearing or graphic descriptions of alcohol abuse.
2. Don't wear anything that could be considered provocative or triggering (such as shirts with beer logos, or in some facilities, even camouflage or sports team branding).
3. Offer no opinion on outside issues even if you gave a strong personal opinion. It is important to represent AA's position and not your own.
4. Do not engage in discussion with the residents about the facility rules, conditions or staff.
5. Use discretion when, and if, you give out personal contact information. A good alternative is to provide the day, time and location of your home group meeting where you may be found after the resident has left the facility.
6. Encourage residents to attend a A.A. meeting in the community as soon as they are released. Give them the phone number to our **BRIDGING THE**

GAP program **941-529-1775** so they can request a ride to a meeting after release. The BTG volunteer will act as a temporary sponsor to help them adjust to life on the outside.

7. Don't flirt or act in a way that could be misinterpreted. Even things said in jest can be taken the wrong way.
8. Respect the residents personal boundaries. For example, not everyone is comfortable being hugged.
9. If your experience involves other addictions, use discretion to ensure you represent A.A. as clearly as possible. Remember our singleness of purpose.
10. Don't ask personal questions that are none of our business, such as why someone has been institutionalized.
11. Don't bring **ANYTHING** into the facility with you. Sometimes in a gesture of sharing we wish to bring donuts, coffee, or other treats. These are not allowed and may cause a problem with various medications, etc. The only thing you should bring with you is a caring and accepting attitude, and perhaps some "Where and When" brochures (where allowed). Handbags should remain locked in your vehicle.

SPEAKERS

To be a speaker:

You should have a year of sobriety or be accompanied by a mentor

It is suggested you have a sponsor and have worked the 12-steps

You should be confident that you will be able to attend the presentation without the need to cancel

Experience, strength and hope explained

In H&I we have some tips and suggestions that will help ensure you are spreading the A.A. message of recovery.

Experience: What life was like before Alcoholics Anonymous. You might talk about your youth or family life, your first obsessive and compulsive behaviors, your first memories of drinking, when you realized you were an alcoholic, the feelings you experienced, how you felt about yourself, how the disease progressed, the things you lost. Ultimately you are identifying with the insanity and unmanageability of living with alcoholism. If your experience involves any type of violence, please be careful to avoid graphic detail of violent acts. Give an honest description, but leave out anything excessive.

Strength: The events or decisions that brought you to Alcoholics Anonymous. We all had that moment of desperation, the “rock bottom” or series of events that brought us into the rooms of AA. Maybe you’ve heard it called the “gift of desperation “ or the place we decided to stop digging our own grave. Your strength is the act of asking for help, then staying in the program even when life in recovery was hard. You might talk about your experience at your first meeting, your first act of surrender, the feeling of living just for today.

Hope: What life has been like since getting sober. For many in early recovery, just staying sober can seem impossible. By sharing about your A.A. program of recovery and how your life has changed as a result of it, you are spreading hope! You can talk about staying sober in early recovery, 90 meetings in 90 days, importance of finding a sponsor and a home group, connecting with the literature, your higher power, working the steps, finding self-acceptance, the gifts of gratitude, how your thinking has changed, how you approach challenges. How today, because of A.A., you don’t have to drink no matter what is going on in your life and that is true freedom!

Remember that a narrative of events isn’t as impactful as sharing feelings, self-image, turning points, or new awareness. These carry a powerful message of recovery.

It's important you tell your own story and that it's genuine. If you're looking for some inspiration of what aspects of your story to tell, consider these ideas:

H.O.W. Honesty, Open Mindedness, and Willingness

H.A.L.T. Hungry, angry, lonely, tired

SURRENDER

ACCEPTANCE

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN RECOVERY

BENEFITS OF FREEDOM FROM ALCOHOL

HOW A.A. IS A SPIRITUAL, NOT A RELIGIOUS, PROGRAM

LEARNING TO TRUST OTHERS, YOUR SPONSOR AND YOUR H.P.

LETTING GO

DO's AND DONT's

Do follow facility rules

Do arrive on time

Do dress appropriately

Do schedule your commitment in your calendar

Do check in with your sponsor

Do use "I" statements. We can only talk about what's going on with ourselves

Do emphasize that **ANY** alcoholic can stop drinking, lose the desire to drink and find a new way to live

Do share the benefits of regular meeting attendance, 90 in 90, etc.

Do emphasize the importance of avoiding new romantic relationships in early recovery

Do share that there is fun in recovery (social events, fellowship, conventions)

Do instill a sense of hope and strength

Do talk about your feelings, self-image, turning points, and new awareness

Do encourage them to call BRIDGING THE GAP **941-529-1775** and attend a meeting the first day they are released.

Don't patronize or preach

Don't break another person's anonymity or tell their story

Don't debate issues involving the facility

Don't discuss medications

Don't spend too much time on what it was like (they already know).

Don't carry excessive cash or wear flashy jewelry

Don't show favoritism

Don't flirt

Don't pry into their personal situation

Don't assume everyone is ok being hugged

Don't bring anything in with you (except A.A. literature, where allowed)

Don't discuss outside issues; remember why we are there.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call the facility coordinator or the H&I Chair.

Thank you for your service! There is nothing more rewarding than giving back to those still suffering!