

SUGGESTIONS FOR AA MEMBERS SPEAKING AT SCHOOLS

The AA suggested Guideline below is based on the experiences of various members of AA who have been directly involved in the setting up of a school data base, introductory letters to schools, follow up procedures, workshops, and speaking to students at schools.

1. SET UP & MAINTAIN SCHOOLS' & SPEAKERS' LISTS

Set up and Maintain High Schools Database

- At the beginning of the school year use Internet directories (White pages & Education Department website) to compile an up to date database of the names, addresses, phone numbers & email addresses of all high schools in the city.
- Write an invitation letter (sample below) and send it to all the schools on the database (no later than the 30th Jan). Adapt the letter for those schools that were visited the previous year, by repeating the gratitude we have for being invited in the previous year.
- A month or two after the initial letter is sent, follow-up with an identical e-mail letter to the schools that have not responded. (This allows for checking of both postal & email addresses).

Sample School Invitation Letter

Dear Sir / Madam (use real name),

I / We represent Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). We would welcome the opportunity to provide information about AA to your students.

With your permission, we could share how many of us, including young people, have been able to arrest alcoholism through AA. We have included some pamphlets about AA for your information.

Last school year we visited x schools, speaking to approximately x young people and x teachers in the xxxxxx and surrounding areas. The response from the schools was very positive with many schools providing letters of reference for the value of the information provided. Copies of these letters are enclosed. The sessions are provided free of charge by volunteer AA members.

I look forward to hearing from you and to providing any further information about AA.

Yours Sincerely,

Local Public Information Committee

(Include Pamphlets of "AA at a Glance", "Message to Teenagers")

Set up and Maintain a List of Speaker Volunteers

Throughout the year keep a list of school speaker volunteers up to date by collecting information on a service work form and updating the school speaker database (include information regarding availability). School speakers should have at least 6 months of sobriety time up. It's also, beneficial, if speakers have knowledge of AA's 12 Traditions.

Inquiries and Invitations to Speak

Throughout the year, Central Service Offices (CSO) refer inquiries for school visits to the PI Coordinator.

2. ORGANISE SCHOOL VISITS

Co-ordinate with Schools

The CSO passes on inquiry details to the PI Co-ordinator, and a suitable time is arranged for the school visit.

Information needed at time of contact:

- Time of visit (you need to arrange to meet speakers 10 -15 mins prior to appointment time).
- Contact name.
- Where the AA speakers should meet (usually an administration office).
- How many students ?
- Boys, girls or mixed class ?
- How much time has been allocated ?
- Talk to the school co-ordinator about the format of the event and see if there are any special requirements that the school has.
- Ask if it is possible for the teacher to be prepared to ask a question or two if the students are too shy to ask.

Co-ordinate with Speakers

The PI Co-ordinator should also be in contact with volunteer AA speakers. New speakers should be contacted and sent a "**Speaking at Non AA Meetings**" pamphlet. New speakers should also be sent out with a more experienced speaker on their first speaking engagement. A follow up call to see how speakers went at the school is a good way to maintain contact with the volunteer speakers.

Once a time for the school as been set for a visit, the PI Co-ordinator should contact school speakers to arrange speakers for the school. The PI Co-ordinator should pass along the following information to the schools speakers:

- What type of school – private, state, mixed class or not, age of students.
- Name of school co-ordinator.
- What time to meet and where.
- Who will be doing the introduction and what the format will be.

Suggestions for PI Co-ordinator

- Make sure all speakers get equal time to share. Don't hog the floor.
- Watch the ego.

Some Do's and Don'ts for School Speakers

- Dress appropriately, clean and tidy.
- Do arrive on time.
- Don't go to a school if you have children attending this school (your children have the right to their own anonymity).
- Remember that we may be the only Big Book that these people will see.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Happy smiling faces and a zest for life is the best message we can carry.

3. VISIT FORMAT

The following is suggested format for speaking at schools and usually includes: Introduction; Speaker's Sharing, Question and Answer time. Copies of the pamphlets: "A Message to Teenagers" are given to the students.

Introduction

The introduction should last for approximately 5 minutes. Remember not to lecture or preach.

- A brief history of AA beginnings (**remember to keep it simple**).
- Mention our anonymity principle.
- Self supporting (not being paid to be here today).
- Not here to tell you not to drink.
- Statistics –
 - Number of AA members world wide (over 2,000,000).
 - Number of Meetings in their City.
 - What times meeting are on.
- Who can go to a meeting.
- How to contact AA – Phone number in the phone book.
- Write the local CSO telephone number or AA helpline number on the blackboard or whiteboard.
- What AA does and what AA does not do.
- We do not give advice on medical, psychiatric, gender or any problems other than alcoholism. (*Tradition 10*).
- We do not provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money or social services. (*Tradition 6*).
- No shame – we talk about it today.
- Mention Al-Anon and Alateen if appropriate, noting that they are separate entities to AA.
- Thank you for allowing us here today.
- We are not an expert in the disease of alcoholism. We can only tell our own story of what it was like, and how we found recovery through the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. (*Tradition 8*).

Speaker's Sharing

The personal sharing time for each speaker should be 10-15 minutes, depending on the time that the school has allocated.

What to Speak About

- Opinions expressed represent our own and are not necessarily the opinions of AA as a whole.
- First drink – age – circumstances.
- How we felt before and after we started drinking.
- The sort of trouble it caused even in the early days.
- Alcoholism – compulsion & obsession – These reactions to alcohol makes me different from a non-alcoholic.
- Dangerous situations (in a general way – remember we are talking to students and teachers).
- Degeneration of physical & mental health.
- Where alcoholism took us.
- What happened when we got to AA.
 - How we are now.
 - What the program of AA has done for us.
 - No longer alone, share my experience and help others.

What NOT to Speak About

- Sex.
- Religion or religious organisations (a lot of schools are church-administered).
- Brands of alcohol.
- Glorification of drugs.
- Swearing.
- Bog down in personal stories.
- Graphic descriptions.
- Personal remarks directed at teachers or any other individuals.
- Suggest our programme is a cure for everything.
- Debate on any outside issues.

Questions and Answers

Allow 5 mins or so for any questions. Listed below are some sample questions and suggested replies.

Q. How do I know if I am an alcoholic?

A. Can you guarantee your behaviour? Can you stop at one? Does your drinking cause you or others problems? Is alcohol costing you more than money? Do you have blackouts?

Q. How much do I need to drink to be an alcoholic?

A. It's not the amount you drink – it's how it makes you feel.

Q. How often do I need to drink to be an alcoholic?

A. Again it's not even how often you drink – it's what happens when you do.

Q. Everyone I know drinks a lot – are they all alcoholics ?

A. No.

Q. I think my Dad/Mum/friend/etc. is an alcoholic. Can you help him/her?

A. AA can help – You can go the Alateen or Al-Anon.

Q. What if you don't want to stop?

A. You need to want to stop.

Q. What if I only drink light beer?

A. Alcohol can affect any one. Light beer is still alcohol.

Q. What should I do if my friends pressure me to drink?

A. Talk to a teacher, parent, or friend.

4. FOLLOW-UP VISIT - FORMAT

Following the visits to each of the schools send a thank you letter (sample below) to the school contact inviting feedback.

Sample School Thanks Letter

Dear Sir / Madam (use real name),

Alcoholics Anonymous would like to thank you for providing the opportunity to speak at your school. We hope that the service was of benefit to all students that attended.

We look forward to hearing from you and would appreciate receiving any feedback or comments from students or teachers. We are happy to provide any further information you require about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Yours Sincerely, Public Information Committee