

Safety in the Rooms

a message from the Safeguarding Committee in Berlin

According to **Tradition One: our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.**

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.

All AA members have the right to feel secure and safe in meetings and within the community. It is the responsibility of the group holding the meeting, through all AA members and trusted servants, to ensure that no member or visitor is subjected to bullying, harassment, discrimination, or offensive behaviour of any kind — online or offline. Everyone has the right to recovery.

Keeping in the spirit of **Tradition Three: the only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking**, A.A. celebrates its members by encouraging inclusion and respecting members with varying abilities, sexual identities, races, ethnicities, gender identities, religions, languages, neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds and ages. As a Fellowship, we strive to support the well-being of all members as we evolve toward greater diversity, equity and inclusivity.

There are a number of situations that can threaten group unity and challenge the safety of the group and its members. Some groups include in their opening announcements that illegal and disruptive behavior is not tolerated. Other groups ask 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. This has been the case since the formation of AA. In cases of persistent inappropriate, predatory, sexual, threatening, and/or violent behaviour that prevents the carrying of the AA message, groups may recall the following:

“This amount of charity does not mean that we cannot exclude those who disturb meetings in progress or seriously interfere with the functioning of the group. Such people can be asked to quiet down or go elsewhere, or, to come back when they are better able to participate.” – Bill W, from a 1969 letter

Discouraged Actions

- Bullying
- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Abusive language
- Offensive behaviour
- Disruptive behaviors in meetings

Other situations that groups have addressed through their group conscience include stalking; threats of violence; financial coercion; racial intolerance; sexual orientation or gender identification intolerance. Other points of intolerance include: 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, or during fellowship, that may affect whether someone feels safe to return to the group.

One of the common forms of harassment in A.A is of a sexual nature. **How can I determine whether a certain behavior I experienced is considered sexual harassment or not?** Here is the definition, which can help in understanding if this is the case:

Definition of Sexual Harassment

- All kinds of unwelcome sexual actions, behaviors, attention, favors, and advances regardless if intended or inadvertent
- Humiliations, degradations, intimidations, or discrimination with sexual content

Examples of how sexual harassment can be expressed:

Verbal

- Ambiguous or abusive language and statements
- Inappropriate jokes
- Questions with sexual content about private life or requests for sexual actions
- Verbal threats

Non-verbal

- Menacing body language
- Leering at someone in an obtrusive or intimidating manner
- Whistling after someone

Physical

- All kinds of physical violence and sexual assaults
- Unwanted kisses, touches, hugs, pats (applies also when the touch seems to happen accidentally)
- Overstepping of physical proximity

Digital / Visual through a medium

- Sending unwanted emails, pictures, or videos with a sexual reference
- Uninvited interactions in social networks
- Cyberbullying

These are only a few examples that illustrate what various forms of harassment can look like; however, there are still other forms it can take. If the behavior doesn't stop, even after you've let the other person know that you're feeling uncomfortable, this can constitute harassment. Again, always go by how you feel. If the thought of seeing someone that consistently fills you with dread, you may be experiencing harassment.

Community is a practice: No one is perfect. We have probably all, at one time or another, not been entirely respectful to our fellows – ourselves included.

Our goal is to continue to progress toward an ideal of unity and group safety. As we move forward, we remember; **progress, not perfection.**

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This is not an official piece of AA literature

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