

RESOURCE FOR

chapter seven TREATMENT

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Frequently asked questions – Treatment professionals	I
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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

TREATMENT PROFESSIONALS

These questions and responses may help a committee when presenting to treatment professionals or when exhibiting at a professional event. Discussing these questions and answers before an event can help committee members provide reliable and consistent information about Narcotics Anonymous.

When preparing for such an event, be mindful that short answers seem to work best. Clear and concise answers help give the audience the information they desire, and trusted servants are better able to maintain a focus on sharing pertinent information. Responding directly to questions asked also helps members avoid venturing off into personal opinions. Pointing to recovery literature, or even holding it in your hand for the audience to see, is often better than directly quoting our literature for responses to questions posed by an audience. Additionally, if NA specific language such as “home group” is used, please explain the meaning for the audience.

Q&A 1

Does NA consider alcohol to be a drug?

Yes. A statement to that effect is part of our fellowship-approved literature, [refer audience members to the White Booklet] and is read at most meetings.

Q&A 2

What is the difference between AA and NA?

AA helped start NA in 1953 by giving NA's founding members permission to adapt their traditions and steps. The primary difference between the two programs is that AA's focus is alcohol and alcoholism, whereas NA's focus is recovery from addiction. In NA, we believe that the use of drugs, including alcohol, is but a symptom of the disease of addiction.

Q&A 3

Is help only available for narcotics addicts?

No. NA's focus is not on a particular class of substances, but is on recovery from the disease of addiction. It is possible that when NA first started, the majority of our members used heroin. It is also worth noting that when NA was founded, drugs such as marijuana were referred to as “narcotics” in the United States. Today, as indicated in our *Membership Survey*, our members use a variety of drugs, including alcohol. Interestingly, 70% of those surveyed list alcohol as one of the drugs used on a regular basis. This survey also provides information about employment status, occupation, gender, and age.

Q&A 4

Some of our clients have stated that they would not feel comfortable in meetings with a bunch of street addicts. Can you address this?

Yes. Our members come from all walks of life, races, ages, and lifestyles. They have diverse backgrounds, religious perspectives, and occupations. In any given NA meeting there will be various demographics including street addicts along with professionals. NA does not focus on an addict's drug use or lifestyle. Our members are available to help anyone with a desire to stop using drugs.

Q&A
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Is NA appropriate for prescription drug addicts?

NA's message is all-inclusive with respect to any mood-changing, mind-altering substance. Our membership includes people whose primary drugs of abuse were prescribed, and who have found recovery through NA. NA is appropriate for any individual who has a desire to stop using drugs.

Q&A
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What is NA's opinion on methadone and other drug-replacement therapies for the treatment of opioid dependence)?

[It may be useful to have Bulletin #29 available, or provide NAWS website link at www.na.org]. In general, we cannot assess anyone's desire to abstain from drugs, and NA has no opinion on drug replacement therapies used by professionals in the management of addiction.

NA is a program of total abstinence; this has provided the foundation for recovery from drug use and for further personal growth. Narcotics Anonymous has only one membership requirement: a desire to stop using drugs. Drug addicts who are participating in drug replacement therapies are welcome in NA meetings.

It should be noted that most meetings ask that people under the influence of any mind- or mood-altering substances listen rather than speak during the meeting, and speak to members on an individual basis before and after the meeting. Meetings that follow this practice do so to preserve an atmosphere of recovery in the meeting. Additional information may be found in the *Public Relations Handbook*, page 67.

Q&A
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Is NA a religious program?

No. The NA program is based on a set of spiritual principles that are not associated with a particular religion. Although our steps call for finding and believing in a "power greater than oneself," this is a personal decision for each and every member to make. Members choose their own "power greater than themselves." Members' beliefs range from nature to organized religion, from no belief that a power exists, to belief in the power of inanimate objects such as rocks. Members are free to choose a belief that works for them personally, and there is no opposition to anyone's choice within the fellowship. We perceive this to be a strength of our program – the unconditional freedom members have with choosing their own personal belief – and in NA meetings one can hear members state that this is an attractive and safe aspect of the fellowship. NA doesn't endorse or oppose any religion. Experience of our members has shown that the spiritual principles work for all members, from the devoutly religious to the atheist and agnostic.

Q&A
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What is your position on treating the dually diagnosed? On medications prescribed for the treatment of mental illnesses?

NA's sole focus is recovery from drug addiction. We do have a booklet titled *In Times of Illness* that discusses the use of medications and the issues that arise for addicts in recovery.

Q&A
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What is your opinion on the harm reduction philosophy?

NA is a program of total abstinence; this has provided the foundation for recovery from drug use and for further personal growth. Narcotics Anonymous has only one membership requirement: a desire to stop using drugs. Addicts taking advantage of such programs are more than welcome to attend NA meetings.

NA neither endorses nor opposes drug replacement strategies. NA does not claim to have the only workable approach to the problem of addiction, nor do we assert that all other approaches are flawed. We claim only that the Narcotics Anonymous approach has been proven very useful to hundreds of communities and tens of thousands of addicts around the world, and may be helpful in your community as well. NA's sole mission is to help people achieve total abstinence and recover from the disease of addiction.

Q&A
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What are your criteria for calling someone an “addict”?

We don't have any criteria. It is for the individual to decide that they are an addict. This helps NA to be inclusive and nonjudgmental concerning anyone's level of drug usage. However, we do offer a pamphlet titled *Am I an Addict?* with questions designed to help people decide for themselves.

Q&A
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Can we send our clients to your meetings with attendance cards, and have them signed there?

Many NA meetings sign attendance cards. This is a choice made by members of that particular home group, or the area as a whole. If a meeting has made a decision not to sign attendance cards, this is usually listed in the local meeting directory. You can encourage your clients to check with an NA member before the meeting to be sure the group signs attendance cards.

Q&A
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Can someone from our facility call a client's sponsor to check on his/her progress?

That is up to the sponsor and the client. If the sponsor is willing to participate in this kind of communication, and has the permission of the “sponsee,” such an arrangement might be possible. However, a sponsor is a volunteer who is not bound by any treatment center's regulations, and would be engaging in this communication as a service to the person he or she is sponsoring, not the treatment center.

Q&A
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Who can I contact if I am having a problem with a sponsor and the work he/she is doing with one or more of our clients?

As indicated in NA's informational pamphlet, *Sponsorship*, sponsorship is a relationship between two members of NA — a more experienced member helping a newer member. If a sponsor is causing difficulties in the treatment of a client, you can have the client obtain a different sponsor. If needed, the local

NA service committee might be able to furnish you with a list of sponsors who are available to help your clients.

Q&A
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In the past, we have tried to have NA meetings at our facility, but your people did not show up consistently. How do I know that things would be any different today?

Today, we have NA members who are willing to meet with staff at your facility and discuss what you would like from NA and what we can realistically provide. We will also provide you with local contact information for any issues that may arise with your facility. Sometimes, in our enthusiasm to help, we may have overextended ourselves by offering services that we are not able to follow up with. Please keep in mind that we are a volunteer organization, continually striving to improve the ways in which we provide services. We are also happy to help start meetings in your facility that can eventually be self-sustaining. [Presenters need to be prepared to tell professionals what commitment can realistically be made, such as weekly meetings or monthly meetings. It may be helpful to have that discussion prior to a presentation, recognizing the human and financial resources of the service body.] Following this presentation, we can discuss your particular needs and arrange for a local NA member to contact your facility.

Note for local service committees: Inconsistencies sometimes happen even though we strive to keep our commitments. Often an inconsistency can be attributed to supplying the facility with only one contact person. It is suggested that a facility be given area information and multiple contact persons to focus on building a relationship with facility personnel

Q&A
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What will we need to provide in order to have a meeting at our facility?

All that is necessary is a meeting space. We will contact you to set up a time to meet with your designated staff to explain how often we may be able to bring a meeting to your facility, which format might work best for you, and the types and frequency of meetings that we are capable of providing. If we find that we are unable to provide consistent support, we may be able to provide literature and material for clients to run stand-alone NA meetings.

Q&A
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I am not an addict, but before referring anyone to an NA meeting outside our facility, I would like to attend one. Is that a problem?

Not at all. As noted in the meeting directory, the legend illustrates which meetings are “open” meetings and which are “closed” meetings. Open meetings are open to anyone who has an interest in Narcotics Anonymous. You are welcome to attend any of those meetings.

Q&A
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How do I know that my clients will be safe if I send them to an NA meeting? Isn't it possible that they might find a new connection, or be able to purchase drugs there?

If a person goes to an NA meeting seeking drugs or a connection, it is possible that they might find what they are looking for (although this is true almost anywhere). However, if a person goes to an NA meeting with a desire to stop using drugs and to learn how to live drug-free, there will be members in the meetings willing to help them.

Q&A
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How do I know that my (female, adolescent, etc.) clients will be safe if I send them to an NA meeting?

Most meetings create a welcoming atmosphere by appointing certain members to act as meeting greeters. Meetings also have member volunteers who are responsible for helping to maintain an environment of recovery. There are common needs meetings, such as women's meetings, gay and lesbian meetings, and young people's meetings in some communities, where some newer members may feel more comfortable.

NA encourages members to support each other and often suggests that women seek other women in recovery, men seek support from men in their recovery efforts, and adolescents seek their peers to add recovery support. To help your clients, you may want to encourage clients to meet women like themselves or adolescents to seek other members who are approximately their age. Additionally, a staff person could have the client contact the NA helpline to speak with an addict of the same sex, perhaps even agreeing to meet the client at the meeting. In that way, the client would be introduced to other members of the group, gaining recovery support.

Q&A
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What if I want to learn more about NA?

Please take these meeting lists and pamphlets. These particular pamphlets, *Information about NA*, *Membership Survey*, and *NA: A Resource in Your Community*, were designed to offer introductory material for professionals. If you need further assistance, please contact [name, trusted servant position, and phone number].

Q&A
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How would I get NA literature for our facility?

Initially, you may want to contact the NA helpline in your community and request literature for your facility. And you are welcome to contact NA World Services by calling 818.773.9999, or visit the NAWS website at www.na.org.

Q&A
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What material do you have for my _____-speaking clients?

[Indicate any local meetings in that language, if available.] NA literature is published in over 40 languages (May 2010). Here is a copy of our current product catalog which highlights all languages in which we have materials published.

Q&A
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Do you have any literature targeted to specific demographic groups?

We have a pamphlet titled *By Young Addicts, For Young Addicts*. Also, the personal stories in our Sixth Edition Basic Text provide a wide range of experiences from our diverse international fellowship. As we move forward with literature development, there may be additional resources for specific demographic groups. [Be familiar with all NA-approved literature.]

Q&A
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What sort of research demonstrates your efficacy?

The anonymous nature of our program has historically made scientific research difficult. However, we do take a survey of attendees at our biennial world convention that you may find interesting [have most recent *Membership Survey* on hand].

Q&A
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Do you have meetings for treatment professionals, so that my staff members who are in recovery do not have to attend meetings with their clients?

Unfortunately, since our only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using, our fellowship has historically been reticent about holding meetings that exclude anyone. Your staff member can review a meeting schedule to determine if there is a local group geared toward professionals. Often treatment professionals become willing to travel a slight distance to a meeting to provide for their anonymity and meet the needs of their recovery program.

Q&A
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What is the cost of attending NA?

There is no cost to attend meetings. However, most groups pass a donations basket during their meetings to pay expenses such as meeting facility rent and refreshments, and to help support NA services. In accordance with our principle of self-support, only NA members should put money in this basket. Members contribute to the welfare of the group and NA as a whole because it is one way that promotes a sense of responsibility for individuals. When many addicts were using drugs, they were irresponsible with all aspects of their lives—paying of bills, being responsible with their employers and families, etc. In recovery, addicts contribute to the welfare of the group through the donations basket. This is an action of responsibility for oneself and for the welfare of NA.