

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONALS

This resource can be used when interacting with **professionals from the criminal justice system**, including **drug court professionals**. These frequently asked questions are meant to help trusted servants educate criminal justice professionals about what NA has to offer to their clients. The Twelve Traditions and the abilities and experiences of the local area service committee will ultimately guide an area's relationship with any professional.

Trusted servants can consider the following points when preparing for interactions with professionals:

- ◆ Responding to questions in your own words often works best—the responses listed below can be used as a guide.
- ◆ Short, simple, direct responses work best. Audience members or those who stop by an exhibit booth usually have limited time and will appreciate a brief response.
- ◆ If NA specific language such as home group is used, please explain the meaning to the audience.
- ◆ Try to keep responses focused on the questions asked. Remember, the goal is to inform members of the public about Narcotics Anonymous—personal disclosure is usually not appropriate or helpful (for example, sharing about the step you are working, how many members you sponsor, and your service commitments is not necessarily relevant).

What follows are possible answers to questions frequently asked in a criminal justice setting:

Drug court personnel who work with drug court referrals may have different questions about NA and the services they can expect. The following questions may be helpful in those interactions.

Q&A

1

How can we work with NA? How can we build a relationship with NA?

A presentation about NA may be the best way to learn about our program of recovery and begin an ongoing relationship. Although NA's Twelve Traditions (the principles that guide our service efforts) limit us from affiliating with outside organizations, we are eager to build a relationship based on the goals we share.

Q&A

2

Can we have meetings here at the courthouse?

Depending on the area's capabilities, you can arrange for a panel or a meeting to be held at the courthouse. A panel is a regularly scheduled presentation that NA members conduct at a facility like the courthouse. An NA meeting is self-sustaining and run by NA members. We are happy to talk with you about which type of meeting might work best.

Q&A
3

Does NA sign court cards?

Many NA meetings sign court cards. This is a choice made by the members of that particular home group, or the area as a whole. If a meeting has made a decision not to sign court 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 court cards.

Q&A
4

For those groups that do sign court cards, will you guarantee that my parolees/probationers will be attending the meeting, and will be staying through the entire meeting?

Attendance at our meetings is free and voluntary. We cannot guarantee that any person will attend a meeting or remain for its entirety. NA maintains no attendance records. We are a program for addicts who want to recover.

Q&A
5

Can sponsors and/or other NA members testify in court to verify the work that my clients are doing?

As indicated in NA's informational pamphlet, *Sponsorship*,
– a more experienced member helping a newer member. Attending court on behalf of a "sponsee" would be an individual decision on the part of a sponsor (or any NA member). NA's traditions (the principles that guide our services) speak to maintaining personal anonymity, neutrality, and having no opinion on outside issues.

Q&A
6

Can I read my clients' step work, and will the sponsor verify that my clients are doing the work that they say they are doing?

Because NA is not affiliated with the courts and because our primary purpose is to help others lead drug-free lives, we would not verify step work with the court. Verifying or sharing step work in that way has the potential to jeopardize the trust that is essential to the sponsorship relationship. However, a client may choose to share their step work with you, and that decision is entirely theirs.

Understanding the criminal justice system and the people who work within that system can only help to build strong, long-lasting relationships. Criminal justice professionals have a variety of relationships with treatment centers and recovery homes that may or may not be different from the type of relationship they can have with NA. It is up to us to clearly communicate the kind of relationships we can have, given our primary purpose and traditions. This kind of communication can only help to build strong relationships and offset any possible misunderstandings.

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

NEWCOMER WORKSHOPS



Group members may have found that, in spite of their best efforts, these newer members' needs are not being met and, with NA's primary purpose in mind, the group has decided to create a plan that will help these new (and potential) members to feel welcome. This plan may include creating a structured format for newcomers. If that is the direction of an area, here are various formats that may be considered:

- ① **Create weekly newcomer meetings.** These meetings would function like any NA meeting; however, they would be identified in the meeting schedule as a "newcomer meeting." The focus of the meeting would be geared to helping new members understand the NA program. The meeting format may contain information that provides meeting basics and etiquette for newer members, such as keytags being given to group members celebrating lengths of cleantime, cakes being served at a particular meeting to celebrate annual recovery dates, donation basket being passed with everyone encouraged to contribute, etc. Some communities use the IPs or Basic Text as a focus for the meeting.
- ② **Create an ongoing, regularly scheduled workshop** (e.g., once a month) geared to the needs of newer members. The workshop could be in a panel format. Trusted servants from the area may accept the commitment for a year, or panel members may be trusted servants of an area subcommittee. These panels provide a forum for new members to ask for information about NA and our language (e.g., What does "clean" mean? Why do you pass a basket? etc.), and to share information about the NA program such as meeting attendance and the concept of sponsorship. These workshops could be held in a meeting facility prior to a regularly scheduled NA meeting, at a treatment center that has clients completing treatment, or perhaps at a courthouse that has a drug court program.
- ③ **Add a brief new member orientation** before the start of regularly scheduled meetings. This would become part of a meeting format and may address:
 - ✍ when attendance slips will be signed,
 - ✍ overview of meeting format,
 - ✍ purpose of keytags, and
 - ✍ purpose of the basket that is passed.

This is not an exhaustive list, and your area may want to include additional items for the brief orientation.

We highlighted three ways to help new members feel welcome in a meeting environment, yet there could be any combination of avenues to help with an influx of members.

Area considerations

Groups can help inform members by announcing the workshops and/or orientations at their meetings. The area could plan to fund literature for these efforts, and trusted servants from various groups can sign up as greeters, speakers, or panel members. In fact, all area groups can rotate the responsibility of providing for the new member orientations. The area may choose to have a newcomer workshop coordinator who assists the groups with planning and maintaining these meetings. These are a few ideas on how an area could welcome new members. Through area brainstorming and planning, an area will find what works best for them.

Planning tips

- ✍ Some newcomers may not be able to focus for long periods of time. Simple, short sharing from members can be helpful in holding their attention.
- ✍ Explaining that NA's philosophy focuses on the disease of addiction rather than any specific drug and that we are inclusive, regardless of drugs used, can be helpful for newcomers.
- ✍ This can be an opportunity to explain sponsorship, various meeting formats listed in schedules, what keytags mean, and why the basket is passed during a meeting.
- ✍ Meeting greeters (with meeting lists) can set the welcome tone.