

DISRUPTIVE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

Groups occasionally experience challenges in maintaining an atmosphere in which recovery can be shared among addicts. This pamphlet addresses one of those challenges: disruptive or violent behavior in NA groups. The information here is meant to help groups fulfill the responsibility of welcoming members without allowing an individual to threaten the safety of those attending a meeting. Below are some examples of the kinds of disruptions that can compromise a group's atmosphere of recovery. What follows are practical solutions for groups in their efforts to address these challenges.

examples

One of our members who recently relapsed after two years clean has been creating a disturbing situation at several meetings, and the disturbance has recently escalated into a very bad situation. Most recently she has gotten more violent and has been verbally attacking several people and making threats of physical violence.

Lately, many members have come to me concerning the problem of some disruptive children in our meetings. I sympathize with parents who need to bring their children to meetings, but it's really disturbing the group and no one wants to speak up about it.

An addict in our group keeps interrupting the speaker or person sharing. He gets up a lot and shares until the end of the meeting. I know his sponsor has tried to talk to him, but he seems uninterested. Our group feels like he holds the meetina hostaae. What can we do?

The following strategies are some of the fellowship's best practices for addressing disruptive or violent behavior. There are varying degrees of disruptive behavior, and many of the challenges groups experience are not as

severe as the ones outlined above. In most cases, a minor disruption can be effectively handled by a well-prepared group secretary, leader, or chairperson. This pamphlet is geared toward those disruptions that occur during an actual meeting. Behaviors that occur outside of a meeting, such as harassment or behavior that exploits members' vulnerabilities, can also affect a meeting's atmosphere of recovery. Although these topics are not directly addressed in this pamphlet, a group's ability to have meaningful discussions will allow a group to better address and resolve any challenges it may face.

Sometimes, NA members who attempt to address a disruptive situation cause just as much of a disturbance as the initial disruption. These suggestions are offered so that members of a group can work together to preserve a meeting's atmosphere of recovery; they are not meant to give members license to exert authority over other members.

Common sense, open minds, calm discussion, accurate information, mutual respect, and healthy personal recovery enable a group to deal effectively with almost anything that comes its way.

The Group Booklet

● Group discussion

The first thing a group can do is discuss the situation in a group business meeting. These discussions can help a group develop a plan for dealing with disruptive behavior and identify who in the group will be responsible for handling specific disruptions. An open and frank group discussion may also highlight some other important solutions and can help group members feel safer and more unified. Groups often experience minor disruptions such as members talking during meetings or unmonitored children. A discussion may not necessarily fix these disruptions, but it can help the group to feel more resolved about the situation.

● Meeting leader's role

A chairperson, leader, or group secretary can help refocus a meeting by interrupting a disruptive share or outburst. It is entirely appropriate for a group leader to help refocus a meeting's atmosphere of recovery by announcing a five-minute break or asking the group to join in a prayer or moment of silence. In an effort to respect members' individual rights, we sometimes forget to respect the group. In our respect for other members, we must not allow any individual to prevent a group from creating an atmosphere of recovery.

● Meeting topic

Another option is for the group to consider having the recovery meeting focused on a discussion about a group's atmosphere of recovery. This discussion would attempt to raise the group's awareness of the spiritual principles that apply to an atmosphere of recovery (such as unity or carrying NA's message). Groups that try this approach would want to be sure to avoid discussing a specific individual's behavior, instead focusing on principles and the group's atmosphere of recovery.

● ASC discussion

The group may consider taking the problem to the area service committee meeting in the hope that discussion there may lead to an increased awareness of the problem and possible examples of resolutions from other groups in the area.

● Approaching the member

If the group decides to approach the disruptive person, the circumstances of each situation will dictate the best way to do this. In some situations it may make sense for one member to discuss the situation with the disruptive individual. This will need to be done in a loving, caring way—tempering honesty with compassion and understanding.

We should be cautious not to put any individual at risk in the attempt to address the problem. In other situations it may be better for two or three of the group's mature, stable members to meet the disruptive individual on his or her way into the meeting each time. These members can help the individual understand what is being asked of him or her, and that violent behavior is not acceptable. Another solution is to keep the meeting going while several group members lead the individual outside. The goal of this approach is not to intimidate or imply authority over someone, but rather to keep the person from disrupting the meeting. Group members can let the disruptive member know that he or she can stay if the disruption stops, but will be asked to go outside if the disruption continues. Again, tempering honesty with compassion and understanding will help here. Great caution must be exercised in order to keep members safe and avoid escalating the situation. Groups can expect that this intervention may need to occur more than once or twice. However, if a group continues to lovingly and firmly address the situation, there is a better chance that the disruptive person will respect the needs of those attending the meeting.

● **Temporarily suspending a meeting**

In some cases, the violent or disruptive behavior may be serious enough for the group to temporarily suspend the meeting. This may mean temporarily stopping the meeting or adjourning until the next regularly scheduled meeting. The objective of this approach is to address the problem and ensure that the meeting is a safe and welcoming place for members.

● **Protecting the welfare of the group**

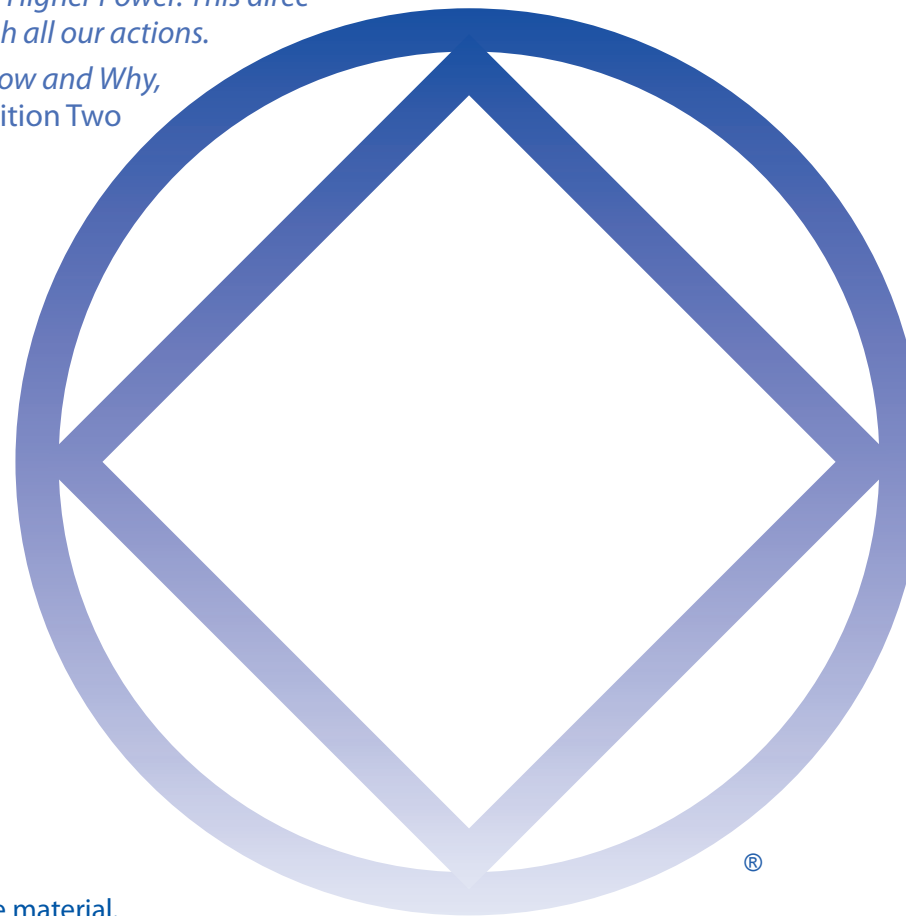
Finally, if a member is violent or threatening violence at an NA meeting and no other approaches have been successful, then the group may decide to call the police. The safety of all addicts who attend the meeting is the primary consideration. While we want to respect each member's anonymity, a violent individual sacrifices his or her right to

personal anonymity by their behavior. Calling law enforcement is appropriate when personal safety is at stake.

These suggestions are meant to help groups establish and maintain an atmosphere of recovery. This information is not meant to give groups authorization to attempt to control other NA members. Keeping our unity and primary purpose as our focus will better allow us to resolve any potential problems or challenges.

Whenever we come together, we seek the presence and guidance of [a] loving Higher Power. This direction then guides us through all our actions.

*It Works: How and Why,
Tradition Two*



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