

Excerpt from [Recovery A to Z](#) ...

Going to the first meeting of any twelve-step program can be a terrifying, confusing, and sometimes paralyzing experience. A person attending a meeting for the first time can take comfort in knowing that each and every person at the meeting had to go through the same experience of walking into that room for the first time. Every member or potential member faced the fear of identifying him- or herself as an addict, alcoholic, overeater, compulsive gambler, codependent, sex and love addict, and then taking that first key tag or chip. Regardless of the length of clean time, recovery, sobriety, or abstinence, there was a time when every single person at that meeting had only one day. That is, perhaps, the most important thing to remember.

There are ways to make the experience a little easier. "Meeting and Fellowship Etiquette" is intended as an easy guide to help you understand what to expect when you walk through the door of your first meeting and what to do while you're there. We hope this guide will be useful for both newcomer and old-timer alike. Showing respect for each group, listening to the members of that group, and following the meeting format will help any newcomer (or old-timer) have an enjoyable meeting experience.

What is Meeting Etiquette?

Meeting etiquette consists of customs, manners, and propriety; it is the way to conduct oneself while in a recovery meeting. Meeting and fellowship etiquette has become an important topic among many members of the twelve-step community, as well as those who refer people to the various twelve-step programs. People "associated," but not "affiliated" with twelve-step recovery, such as judges, law enforcement and medical professionals, and others are taking an increasing interest in what actually happens to a newcomer being sent to his or her first meeting. These professionals want to ensure that any newcomer is treated with respect and that those people they refer to meetings are not taken advantage of. They also want to ensure that the meetings actually provide those services as presented in the public relations material from various twelve-step service bodies.

Meeting etiquette has traditionally been a concept passed down from one recovering person to another, e.g., from sponsor to sponsee or a more experienced member to the newer member. There is no standard or accepted model beyond what is written in the Twelve Traditions; however, it is common for each member to take personal responsibility for his or her own fellowship and to make certain that there is an atmosphere of recovery found in the meetings. Most "violations" of meeting etiquette are usually addressed by more long-standing members of a group, usually in a kind and tolerant way.

Examples of meeting etiquette are as follows:

- Getting to a meeting early enables an attendee to get a beverage, use the restroom, socialize,

12-Step Meeting & Fellowship Etiquette - 12 Step Recovery

Written by Matt

Friday, 16 October 2009 22:31 -

etc., so they can:

- Be sure of a seat before the meeting begins;
- Avoid the disruption of performing these activities while members are reading or sharing.
- Leaving and returning to one's seat or speaking to one's neighbors during the meeting is frowned upon, as this distracts those who may be sharing, or those attempting to pay attention.
- If asked to read one of the passages or literature selections, it is considered respectful to read them as written, without adding comments or "sound effects." The literature of each twelve-step program was written with great care to be of help to those who suffer. It was voted on by group conscience and each fellowship as a body agreed on the final presentation. Anyone with a disagreement on a particular reading should simply excuse him- or herself from reading it aloud and discuss it afterward, privately, with a sponsor or other program member. "Editorial comments" or "callbacks" in a meeting might confuse or alarm newcomers or others who desperately need to hear the message of recovery as it was intended.
- Using only the language and literature consistent with the twelve-step meeting you are attending ensures that a clear message of recovery is being offered. Using mixed language from various fellowships sends mixed messages and can cause newer members to be confused about the meeting's primary purpose.
- The guideline against "cross-talking" or "sniper sharing" (see page XX) helps maintain a calm and safe atmosphere of recovery in the meetings.
- "Stay in the meeting 'from prayer to prayer.'" Since most meetings begin and end with a prayer, "staying in the meeting from prayer to prayer" means both physical attendance and mental focus on the meeting from beginning to end.
- The Seventh Tradition states that groups should be fully self-supporting and decline outside contributions. This allows twelve-step groups to carry the message the way it was intended, without the influence of outside people or organizations. It is customary to put a contribution in the basket if one can afford to, but it is not required, nor it is appropriate for a visitor (or newcomer in the first thirty days of recovery, in some fellowships).
- Members do not publicly mention specific facilities, treatment centers, detoxification units, hospitals, halfway houses, etc. Doing so is considered an implied endorsement of these facilities/entities by the member. This is especially important if a member serves on an area or regional public information service body. As such, the member is viewed by the public as a representative of his or her fellowship and will think that the fellowship, rather than the member, is endorsing a specific entity.
- Members refer to the meeting by its name rather than the facility where it is held. Referring to a facility may imply a relationship with the facility.
- Members refrain from mentioning specific drugs or tell overly detailed "war stories" ("drunkalogues" or "drugalogues"); it can make others in the meeting uncomfortable if specific drugs or excessive details are mentioned.
- Many groups will ask members to keep their sharing between three to five minutes in order to give everyone who wishes to share a chance to do so. This is especially important if the meeting has a large number of members in attendance.
- Members show respect for the facility where the meeting is held. Twelve-step programs may not be affiliated with the facility, but they have a responsibility to make certain that the meeting area is left in as good a condition or better than it was found. Smokers should dispose of cigarette butts in an appropriate manner, using cigarette receptacles or ashtrays. Be mindful of behavior outside the meeting as well; negative complaints from neighbors to the facility is a direct reflection on the twelve-step group and have caused many groups to lose a meeting place. Many meetings are held in public places. Groups want to make sure that the behavior of a few members does not negatively affect the fellowship as a whole.

If someone is being disrespectful or placing the meeting location in jeopardy, then it is usually

12-Step Meeting & Fellowship Etiquette - 12 Step Recovery

Written by Matt

Friday, 16 October 2009 22:31 -

the responsibility of the chairperson or secretary to bring the issue to that person's attention. However, no person has the power or authority to berate, reprimand, or expel another from a twelve-step program. They can ask an individual not to return to a particular group or facility if chronic negative behavior puts the facility or its members at risk. The meeting secretary has a responsibility to approach the disruptive person and explain, in a respectful manner, why or why not a certain practice is unacceptable.