

**PPG-05**

**FAMILIES ANONYMOUS (FA)**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET POLICY**

**Adopted by the World Service Board March 17, 2012  
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## SETTING UP A LOCAL WEBSITE

Decisions in Families Anonymous (FA) are typically made during group conscience meetings. If an FA group or intergroup wishes to create a website, the group conscience process should be used. A website development committee should be formed to discuss and oversee all aspects of the project, including all possible concerns about the impact of the Website on the FA Traditions as well as the website's name, website design and how to deal with website content. They may wish to seek the help of technical experts for planning and implementation.

As part of the planning process, the website development committee should inform other groups in the area and the World Service Board about their intent to create a website. When the planning committee has reached its own consensus about its role and responsibilities and the scope of the website, its findings should be shared with the group and/or the intergroup so that a decision can be made through an informed vote at a group conscience meeting regarding whether to move ahead with the development of a website.

## FA TRADITIONS

We observe all FA's Traditions on FA Websites.

**Anonymity**— Tradition 12 reminds us that “anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions”, thus we practice anonymity on FA Websites at all times. For more information on anonymity online, see the section of this Policy, “Guarding Anonymity Online.”

**Non-Affiliation, Non-Endorsement**—Tradition 11 states, “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of our members, as well as those of other recovery programs.” Linking to other FA Websites will often have the positive effect of significantly broadening the scope of a site. However, even when linking to another FA site, care should be exercised since each FA entity is autonomous, has its own group conscience, and may display information that another FA group conscience might find objectionable. There is no way to know when this might occur. Linking to non-FA sites is even more problematic. Not only are they much more likely to display non-FA and/or controversial material, but linking might imply endorsement, if not affiliation. In the final analysis, *we strongly suggest that, linking to other websites should NOT be done except in those instances where the link is part of a convention committee's information.* The same caution is advised when choosing a Web hosting site. Many “free” Web hosting services require that the Website include mandatory advertisements or links. This can be construed as actual or implied affiliation or endorsement of the products or services listed in those ads. It is prudent to create a Website through a service that does not include mandatory advertisements or links.

Website committees should attempt to avoid some of these pitfalls by confining links to known FA service entities and by incorporating a mandatory exit statement (a pop-up statement that informs the user that you are about to leave the FA Website) when someone wishes to activate the outside links on the site. (This statement should also cover access to application software such as Adobe Reader, which is provided to assist visitors in reading Portable Document Format (PDF) files.)

Based on FA's Traditions, one-on-one sharing and anonymity are ongoing membership needs that should be taken into account when discussing the use of a website as means to disseminate FA information.

Website committees should not only discuss the technical aspects of developing a website, but they should also address questions related to preserving the Traditions of FA. They should work to avoid a loss of the "personal touch" and "community" when relying too heavily on technology and they should strive to find a balance that works for the entire group. It will be up to the committee's informed group conscience to determine what FA content is useful and appropriate. The good news is that today's decisions can be reviewed, revised, abandoned or expanded. A committee can always try something for a certain length of time and then come back and determine how well it is working. This is the FA way!

## "PRIVATE" SECTIONS OF FA WEBSITES

Some groups may wish to designate certain parts of their Websites as "private," which require the use of usernames and passwords to gain entrance. In some instances, the only requirement to receive a username and password is to state to the Webmaster or another trusted servant that you are a FA member. In other cases, access is only available to those holding specific service positions.

Website committees that are considering creating password-protected sections of their Websites may wish to consider: what content is private and what is public; who will be given access to the private information, and how; and how usernames and passwords will be communicated, stored and/or maintained. Some Websites may wish to use these private sections to change or update meeting information or trusted servant contact information. When giving the ability to a service worker to change content on a Website or database, committees should proceed with care. Members with the ability to change content may need training on the software used, and the committee may want to designate someone to review the data for accuracy.

Website committees should discuss how they will safeguard confidential FA information, and how to avoid a breach in security. Some FA members may feel comfortable using their full names and giving personal contact information on a password-protected FA Website. However, other members may be less comfortable providing this information for communication purposes, even on a password-protected site. Committees should exercise care in helping members learn about new modes of communication, and they should continue to offer members the option of receiving FA correspondence by mail if preferred.

## WEBSITE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

After an informed group conscience structure is in place to decide the contents, policies and procedures involved in setting up and maintaining a FA Website, it is suggested that a Web Master (Web Manager) be appointed or elected. The Web Master is responsible to the committee or the group(s) served by the website.

Some website committees choose to create their own Website guidelines, including: description of the site's purpose; details of the Website's content; procedures for adding or removing content; committee rotation schedule; defining the difference between a Website committee and a Website maintenance team (e.g. Webmaster and alternate); guidelines for the Website committee and, if applicable, guidelines for the Website maintenance team outlining its composition and responsibilities.

## SELECTING A DOMAIN NAME

The choice of a domain name should, as with other critical elements, be determined by an informed group conscience. To preserve Families Anonymous trademarks and service marks, Website committees are asked to avoid using the following fellowship trademarks in their domain names F.A., TABW, Today a Better Way, etc. It may be desirable to consider integrating lower case "fa" into the domain name along with other identifying information (e.g., [www.faintergroup111.org](http://www.faintergroup111.org) or [www.fagroup123.org](http://www.fagroup123.org)).

## WEBSITE CONTENTS

Copyright restrictions protect material displayed on Websites just as copyrights protect FA's printed literature. Permission must be obtained from the FA World Service Board prior to including FA material.

Just as with the Twelve Step Rag, Websites created by FA groups and intergroups can quote a phrase, sentence or brief paragraph excerpted from FA literature – such as Today A Better Way, The Twelve Steps of FA and FA's Twelve Traditions in Action, etc.—without a prior, written request. When this occurs, the proper credit line should be included to ensure that FA literature copyrights are protected. After a brief quotation from an FA book or pamphlet, the following credit line should appear: Reprinted from (name of publication, page number), with permission of the FA World Service Board.

We ask that you do not reproduce items that are currently available on the FA Website. Instead, link to the appropriate pages of the site: [www.familiesanonymous.org](http://www.familiesanonymous.org).

## GENERAL SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES

Facebook and other social networking Websites are public in nature. Though users create accounts and utilize usernames and passwords, once on the site, it is a public medium where FA members and non-FA members gather. As long as individuals do not identify themselves as FA members, there is no conflict with our traditions. However, someone using their full name and/or a likeness, such as a full-face photograph, would be contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition. It is in keeping with the Eleventh Tradition not to disclose FA membership on social networking sites, as well as on any other Website, blog, electronic bulletin board, etc., that is not composed solely of FA members and not password protected, or is accessible to the public. Websites like Facebook and Twitter offer individuals the chance to post a great deal of personal information about themselves (and others). While most FA members will not post anything that is “FA jargon” on their personal profiles and in “status updates,” others may feel it is alright to do so as long as FA or Families Anonymous are specifically not mentioned.

These websites often allow users to create social networking “groups” and the ability to invite others to “events” for like-minded individuals. FA members may choose to create FA-related groups. Since this is a relatively new medium, FA members may be “learning as they go,” and technology and applications change practically on a daily basis. However, our experience suggests that FA-related groups and events are better listed as “closed” or “invitation-only” groups. Even then, some FA members may not wish to be contacted for an FA event on their personal social networking page — they may feel their anonymity is breached by being included in an invitation list that can be viewed by all invitees. Perhaps a better option is to create a completely “private” group which does not appear in any group searches or on any personal profiles, and is by invitation to fellow FA members only. Currently, this seems to be the closest option for trying to recreate the atmosphere of a FA meeting and would maintain members’ anonymity most effectively.

No local online FA or non-FA entity should purport itself to be a spokesperson for FA or act as if they represent the fellowship as a whole. Each FA entity is autonomous and encouraged to make decisions by informed group conscience decision based on the guidance provided in our Twelve Traditions.

FA members may contact the WSO ([famanon@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:famanon@familiesanonymous.org)) or the FA Public Information Committee ([pi@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:pi@familiesanonymous.org)) for suggestions on how to remain within the Traditions on social networking Websites. Keep in mind that WSO staff and PI Committee members are not “technological Guru's” but they may act as a resource regarding FA’s Twelve Traditions and the shared experience of the worldwide Fellowship . How FA’s spiritual principles play out in new technologies needs to be carefully discussed by each FA group that plans to create an online presence.

## POSTING GROUP OR INTERGROUP MINUTES AND REPORTS

Deciding what contents to post on public websites requires careful consideration. As it is helpful when websites make minutes of meetings, reports and background material readily available to a broad population, it is also paramount to keep in mind that these documents may be posted in a public medium. To ensure anonymity, each document needs to be reviewed and edited to insure that the full names of FA members are not included. The only exception might be an employee of Families Anonymous or a consultant who are defined within the scope of Tradition 8 as a “special worker.” (Tradition 8 states, “Families Anonymous Twelfth-Step work should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.”)

## SPEAKER TALKS ONLINE

Committees may wish to disseminate audio files of FA talks over the Internet. It should be common practice to ask an FA member or other speaker before posting their talk on an FA website. Likewise, if a member objects to having his or her FA story broadcast publicly, he or she may wish to contact the site’s web master and request its removal.

It is best to encourage speakers not to use full names and not to identify third parties by full names in their talks. The strength of our anonymity tradition is reinforced by speakers who do not use their last names. When posting a recording of a speaker on the website, do not identify the speaker by last name, title, service job or other identifying description.

## ANONYMITY AND E-MAIL

E-mail is a widely used and accepted method of communication. It is now used regularly as a service tool in FA, but as with any service, we need to ensure that our Traditions are maintained while still receiving the most benefit from this form of communication. When using e-mail it is necessary to consider the anonymity of the recipients of messages. Sending messages to multiple recipients that disclose the e-mail addresses of everyone on the addressee list is a potential break of someone else’s anonymity. Therefore, it is a good idea to obtain a recipient’s explicit permission before using his or her e-mail address for FA correspondence, especially if it is a workplace email address. When sending FA mail to multiple recipients who wish to remain anonymous, use the BCC (Blind Courtesy Copy) option available on most computers.

## USING FULL NAMES IN E-MAILS TO PROFESSIONALS

It is suggested that e-mail communication with professionals is similar to a letter-mailing project with two caveats: 1) e-mails can easily be forwarded, and 2) the contents of e-mails can easily be cut-and-pasted, changed and/or uploaded to Websites. For the purposes of cooperation with the Professional Community or Public Information services, it lends credibility to the e-mail if a full name is used and that the e-mail has a professional look and feel. For example, your group Public Information Committee Chair may wish to respond to e-mail requests from the media with the following signature:

Sincerely,  
John Doe (name not for publication)  
Chair, Public Information Committee

## ANONYMITY ON PERSONAL COMPUTERS

Some FA members may think, “I have my own computer, so I have nothing to fear about the anonymity of FA members in my address book.” However, it is possible that a motivated individual could obtain a username and password to access another person’s e-mail account. Hopefully, such an intrusion would not occur, but it may be prudent to select a password that is as unique as possible and to keep the password private.

Even the most guarded e-mail account could be “hacked” by a computer expert, but many FA members and committees may be willing to take this risk, all the while utilizing prudence and good common sense. We may also want to consider that e-mail address books used for FA correspondence on a home personal computer, laptop, PDA, smart phone, etc., may be available to friends and family if more than one person uses the device.

## E-MAIL IN FA —ACCESS, ADDRESSES AND ROTATION

It is not necessary to own a personal computer or laptop to utilize e-mail. FA members who do not have computers may use free e-mail services to obtain an e-mail account and specifically designate it as their FA e-mail service. FA members can check their e-mail accounts at public libraries, Internet cafes, and anywhere else Internet service is available.

For FA service positions, generic e-mail addresses can be passed from one trusted servant to another at rotation time. For example, the sample e-mail address and account for FAGroupXXXXSecretary@gmail.com could, upon rotation, be passed on, maintaining the e-mail address identity for the position, one rotation to the next.

## THE DANGERS OF SPAM

It is strongly suggested that FA members not send bulk unsolicited e-mail messages for FA service, i.e., e-mail "blasts." By doing so they could be bringing the FA name into public controversy and damaging the reputation of FA as a whole. It may also be illegal, so be familiar with local and federal laws pertaining to e-mail communication and spam. Instead, the committee could discuss the possibility of sending FA correspondence to a small number of recipients or sending personalized e-mails one at a time. E-mails may be filtered into a recipient's spam account so an alternative follow-up plan should also be in place in case there is no initial response. In addition to FA members continuing to make personal contacts, an effective route for interacting with professionals and the public has been to provide the link to FA's Website, [www.familiesanonymous.org](http://www.familiesanonymous.org).

## INTERNET STREAMING AND WEB CONFERENCING

Among FA members, there are various levels of experience in the use of computers, e-mail and the Internet. It is important to remember that not all FA members have computers and not all who have access are comfortable using this technology. Some people are just now signing up for their first e-mail accounts, while some are talking about things like "Internet streaming", "tweeting", "Teleconferencing technology," and "Web conferencing." Committees should consider the best ways to utilize Internet streaming and/or teleconference/Web technology so that members may participate in area conferences without traveling to the conference site. Consider such options as: video and audio conference; audio-only conference; full stream one-way video and audio with text chat return. Many technological options are possible and, presumably, more are being developed each day. Yet, as stated earlier, it is important not to let the speed of technological development pressure a committee into a quick solution as opposed to a well-thought-out FA-oriented decision. Of course, all decisions should include careful consideration of any situations where an FA member's anonymity could be compromised at the public level.

FA has two online meeting formats:

**FA's E-Meeting:** The Emeeting is an email discussion group. It is the largest and most active group in the fellowship consisting of more than 500 members. It is available to the members 24 hours a day / 7 days a week. Members of the group hail from all over the world and share their Experience, Strength and Hope by typing their message to the list. The Emeeting averages more than 2000 email messages per month. For more information on the FA E-Meeting, please see the FA website.

**FA Meeting Without Walls:** Unfortunately, there are places where FA does not yet have a local meeting group. In response to tremendous need, members of the fellowship have started a real-time, online voice meeting that follows the format of our traditional face-to-face group meetings. Participation only requires one to download and install the free software, follow our set up directions, have an internet connection, a microphone and speakers. The dates and times of the Meeting Without Walls sessions can be found of the FA Website.

***One Important Note*** - many members choose to open a separate email account to keep this separate from their private email. There are many free email account services such as gmail, yahoo, hotmail etc. you can use for this purpose.

## LOCAL SHARED EXPERIENCE REQUESTED

Local FA needs and experience will determine how FA communications will develop in this evolving electronic age. If you have questions, or if you would like to share your Website committee's experience, please contact the FA World Service Office at:

Families Anonymous  
701 Lee Street  
Suite 670  
Des Plaines, IL 60016  
Email - [famanon@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:famanon@familiesanonymous.org)  
*Phone – (847) 294-5877*  
*Phone – (800) 736-9805 (***US Only***)*  
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