

## Introduction to an FA Meeting

Although the tragedy of drug abuse and alcoholism is common knowledge, few people are aware of its effects on the families of the abusers. People who have not had to confront addiction in their families cannot understand the special hell that becomes a “new norm” of life: daily crises, frequent confrontations, and the hopeless stress of anxiety.

There are few frustrations to compare with that of watching helplessly as loved ones head toward self-destruction. As drug abusers continue their dysfunctional and sometimes illegal behaviors—lying, cheating, and stealing from any source available, including families, friends, and employers—they often become caught up in the law-enforcement system. A wide range of wealthy, middle-income, and poor families—who in their entire lives might never have seen the inside of a jail—now face the challenge of responding to their loved ones’ pleas for bail. Hardworking, honest, conscientious people find themselves drained of hope and money.

Family members are typically too embarrassed and ashamed to confide in, or discuss their problems with, their relatives or closest friends. Although they may seek counsel from psychiatrists, therapists, clergy members, and other professionals, they may also find themselves needing more practical help and support from other people who are coping with the same insanity in their own lives. There is an organization of fellow sufferers that offers such proven and beneficial support: FAMILIES ANONYMOUS™ (FA™).

More than 400 FA meetings are held weekly throughout the United States and in Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Russia, Spain,

and the United Kingdom. Online e-meetings and web-based forums also take place as alternatives or supplements to face-to-face meetings.

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### Welcome to an FA Meeting!

Newcomers find a warm welcome when they enter an FA meeting for the first time. They see young and old, men and women—people from all walks of life—seated together and interacting with each other.

Each week a different member volunteers to serve as the meeting’s “leader.” That person follows an approved meeting format that explains FA’s tradition of anonymity and the importance of our using first names only. Various other members are called upon to read aloud the five readings that form the basis of the FA program. These five readings—*About Drug Abuse*, *The Four Destructive Forces*, *The Twelve Steps of FA*, *The Twelve Traditions of FA*, and *Helping*—differentiate the FA philosophy from that of other Twelve Step programs.

During the meetings, members share their personal experiences: what brought them to FA, what they were like before they began working the program, and how they have changed. People may choose to speak, or they may simply listen. FA meeting rooms are safe havens, where all attendees are free to share their personal experiences in a setting that is free from judgment, guilt, blame, or shame.

Some meetings may focus on one of the Steps or Traditions. Others may deal with a particular topic: perhaps an FA slogan, a piece of FA-approved literature, or a reading from our daily-thought book, *Today a Better Way*™. Members are encouraged to think about the personal relevance of the meeting’s theme, to share their feelings about it, and to describe how they have or have not yet applied it in

their own lives. Relating a specific incident allows members to let off steam. Here, in an FA meeting, they can speak freely to fellow members who have been through many of the same horrors, who understand, who care, and who will respect their anonymity.

Members often share something positive. Learning that someone’s loved one has chosen to enter a rehabilitation program, for example, can give other members hope that their loved ones, too, may choose the path of recovery. Sharing our strengths and experiences—the positive ones as well as the negative ones—can reinforce the mutual bond that draws members together.

As members unburden themselves, newcomers are sometimes shocked to hear stories as bad as, or even worse than, their own! They realize that their experiences aren’t the only tragedies. If newcomers choose to speak, they may sense an encouraging spirit and warm understanding. A newcomer may suddenly realize that what he or she thought was a personal, private horror story is not unique. Everyone at the meeting has had similar experiences! New members begin to feel they have a place in the “FAMily.”

Having broken the ice, newcomers may gradually become receptive to the wisdom gleaned from the experiences of others. Part of the FA credo is that members do not give advice; instead, they relate their own experiences, describe how they have handled life’s challenges, and talk about how the FA program has worked for them.

As longtimers describe their struggles with trying to establish boundaries, refusing to put up bail, asking their abusers to leave home, or using legal means to protect themselves, newer members may feel relief as they recognize the principle that makes such forceful measures necessary: *You have the right to protect your own well-being and to protect what is yours.*

As members talk about the reality of substance abuse as a disease, newcomers begin putting their own admitted powerlessness into perspective as they acknowledge the validity of the “Three C’s”:

1. WE DIDN’T CAUSE IT.
2. WE CAN’T CONTROL IT.
3. WE CAN’T CURE IT.

Parents and other family members can begin laying their guilt to rest once they realize that no one causes another person’s chemical dependency, no one can control an addict who chooses to use drugs, and no one but the addict can decide to begin the recovery process. As members discuss, read, and learn more about substance abuse, they also come to recognize and accept that *they* are a part of the problem! They, too, have an addictive disease: the disease of codependency.

With a greater understanding and a change of attitudes, family members can begin relieving the tensions that stand in the way of recovery—both their own recovery and the recovery of their addicted loved ones.

Meetings conclude with “passing the basket,” in accordance with our 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition, which states that “all groups should be fully self-supporting.” Voluntary donations, made by the meeting’s attendees, help with expenses, such as rent, coffee-break supplies, literature, and donations to FA’s World Service Office.

FA meetings traditionally close with members forming a circle, joining hands, and reciting the “Serenity Prayer”:

*God, grant me the serenity to  
accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can, and  
wisdom to know the difference.*

... followed by a concluding slogan, such as:

***Keep coming back! It works!***

*To order additional copies of this  
or other FA literature,  
to find a local group or  
an online meeting, or  
to obtain information about starting  
a new group in your community,  
please contact:*

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