

## "Real Life" Traditions Problems

Here are some real world Traditions questions that have come up in recent years. In discussing them, rely on the Traditions instead of "common sense", "the way it's always been done", gut feelings, etc. In most cases, more than one Tradition is involved. *(Note: If you change these questions, update the footer at the bottom of the page!)*

1. Should we list groups and meetings in the Where & When if they seem to be ignoring Traditions? For example, what if they are: accepting a rent-free space, discussing outside issues, changing the AA message, preaching religion, claiming that AA has political opinions, studying non-AA literature, turning alcoholics away, allowing non-alcoholics to lead the meeting, accepting donations from non-alcoholics, etc.? What Traditions apply here?
2. Sometimes an AA member has a setback with something other than alcohol, such as drugs, binge-eating, gambling, sexual misconduct, compulsive shopping, or unhealthy relationships. Should they: Change their sobriety date? Give up their sponsees? Resign their AA service position? Should they discuss their drugs, binging, gambling, etc. in AA meetings? We might never agree on these questions, but which Traditions should guide us? (Think of at least four!)
3. Does AA have an opinion on medications for depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc.? Is it okay to express your own medical opinions in meetings, as long as you don't claim to represent AA? What Traditions are involved?
4. Does AA have an official definition of "alcoholism" or "sobriety"? If yes, is it a medical opinion, and where is it written in our literature? Is AA's purpose to teach people about alcoholism? What Traditions are related here?
5. What do the Traditions say about using last names at meetings? Which Tradition(s)?
6. The General Service Office has reported that several hundred people every day reveal their AA membership somewhere on the Internet – in news stories, blogs, social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.). Is this in conflict with any Traditions? Which ones? If this is a problem, what can we do about it?
7. To participate in an AA meeting, some members may require a sign-language interpreter or other special service. Does that person have to pay for it themselves? Is it okay to pay for an interpreter with group or district funds? If government money is available, can AA groups accept that money to pay for the service? What Traditions might be involved here?
8. Should meetings allow children to attend? Should they provide on-site babysitting? Is it the group's job to help people deal with challenges such as childcare, elder-care, hearing impairment, inability to read, difficulty with stairs, or lack of transportation? In addition to the operational challenges, what Traditions might be involved?

9. Some groups arrange for their bank to require two authorized signatures, not just one, before cashing a check written on the group's account. This protects the treasurer from any temptation to steal the group's funds. Is this a failure to trust the trusted servants? How closely should we monitor them? What Tradition(s) talk about trusted servants, and what other Traditions might be involved here?
10. Is it okay to use group or district funds to pay for: dances, barbecues, picnics, balloons, birthday cakes, sobriety coins, key chains, donuts, coffee? Are these what people envision when they put money in the basket? What Traditions might guide your answers?
11. Does telling someone the name of your sponsor break the sponsor's anonymity? Does it break a Tradition? Does sharing something a person said at a meeting break their anonymity? Which Traditions talk about anonymity?
12. What Traditions are involved in a group's decision to move to a new meeting place? (Try to name at least six!)
13. Are "specialty groups" okay? These might include groups for: women, men, young people, gays, doctors/lawyers/professionals. Sometimes there have been groups for: Christians, HIV-positive, dual-diagnosis (alcoholics with other mental illness), etc. Are these groups about inclusion or exclusion? Should they just be meetings instead of "groups"? What Traditions are related to this? (Try to name four or more!)
14. At open meetings, should non-AA's contribute money? Should they share? Should they be allowed to lead the meeting or help with other work? In your opinion, what is the purpose of an open meeting? What Traditions are involved here? (Probably at least six.)
15. Should a group give away free AA literature? If so, does that include all AA literature, or just the basics? What Traditions are you thinking of?
16. Can an AA group accept a valuable gift from a non-member or a "friend of AA", such as: free meeting space, furniture, refreshments, advertising? Could the group accept these as contributions from an AA member? What if other non-profits are also getting the same deal? What Traditions are guiding your answers?
17. Most members avoid discussing politics in meetings, but some discuss their religious views. Is this the same thing? Is it okay to discuss religion as long as you are criticizing it? What Traditions might apply here?
18. Which Traditions talk about reading literature that is not Conference-approved at AA meetings? For instance, in a meeting is it okay to: Read from the AA-related books "Drop The Rock", "A New Pair of Glasses", or "Not-God"? Discuss Joe & Charlie material? Read from a self-help or psychology book? Which Traditions are you thinking of?

19. Is it okay at AA meetings to say the Lord's Prayer, which is in the Christian Bible? Is it okay to say other prayers from the Bible, Koran, Talmud, Bhagavad-Gita, or other religious or spiritual books? Which Traditions could guide us on this? (Think of at least four!)
20. If AA is not affiliated with any outside organizations, is it okay to provide space for Al-Anons at an AA convention? If so, should we provide space for other 12 Step fellowships as well? What Traditions relate to this question?
21. Is an online meeting a real AA meeting? Is an online group a real AA group?
22. Now that AA accepts donations online, is there going to be a problem with outsiders donating money?
23. Is it okay to name a group after the institution that provides space, such as a hospital, church, social service agency, or treatment facility? Does that imply affiliation or endorsement? Which Traditions might be involved?
24. GSO has suggested that anonymity should continue even after death, i.e., no announcement in obituaries. Can you think of any reasons for or against this suggestion? What Traditions relate to this issue? (Try to think of at least three!)
25. Does "autonomy" give groups the right to leave a mess (coffee-stained carpet, cigarette butts on lawn, lights left on, air-conditioner left on high, etc.)? What do you do about groups who give AA a black eye?
26. Imagine a group that pays for its own rent, coffee, and literature, but does not support or participate in AA beyond the door of its own meeting. What Traditions might such a group be ignoring? (Try to think of at least two!)
27. Is AA a charity? Can you count your AA donations as a tax deduction?
28. If a group can't afford to pay rent, is there any other way they can be self-supporting with regard to their landlord? Why would a group not be able to pay rent?
29. Is it okay to ask someone to leave your group or meeting for being rude or dangerous? Drunk? What do you do about members who explore the halls of a church, ignore the smoking policy, use the church phone, talk on their cell phone in the meeting, curse loudly in the common areas, etc.? What Traditions might apply here? (Try to think of at least two!)
30. What (if anything) do you do about members who create a bad public impression of AA in service situations? For instance, at a Public Information presentation or a jail meeting, causing problems through bad behavior, shabby appearance, disrespectful attitude, misrepresentation of the recovery program, or ignorance of the Traditions?
31. Is it okay for people who really aren't sure if they're alcoholics to attend closed meetings? What Tradition(s) or literature support your answer?

32. Some groups are willing to "sign slips" from judges or parole officers, and others aren't. How many people in AA or the community are affected by this decision? What are some possible long-term consequences of our action in either case? Besides "sign" or "don't sign", do we have any other options? Which Traditions are involved?
33. Can a group make rules that go beyond the AA Traditions, such as "no smoking" or "no foul language"? What Tradition(s) might help answer this question?
34. What should a GSR do if convinced that the group is wrong? At district and area meetings, should GSR's vote the group's conscience or their own? What Traditions apply here?
35. If you disagree with something your group is doing, should you quit? Is this a Tradition question?
36. Is it okay to encourage people to attend your meeting or join your group? Is that "promotion"? Does it affect other groups? What Traditions or literature do you use to support your opinion?
37. Are AA hats, T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc., in violation of the Traditions? Which ones?
38. A book publisher in Germany was publishing copyrighted AA literature without our permission, for a profit, and not paying royalties on the copyrights. We sued to stop them, and we won the case. Were we right to sue, or were we engaging in outside issues and controversy?
39. Manufacturers of sobriety medallions were using our trademarked circle & triangle symbol on their coins. We initiated legal proceedings but eventually gave up our trademark. Do we need an official symbol that no one else can use? What Traditions might apply here?
40. Sometimes members use their employer's copier to make AA flyers. Does this constitute "affiliation"? Is it in conflict with self-support? If it's only a few bucks' worth of copies, is it okay? Is this a Traditions question?

41. Due to a clerical error on our part, many years ago we lost the copyright to the 1st and 2nd edition of the English-language Big Book, so it's legal for other people to print those editions. Let's say someone is printing 1st Edition Big Books with red covers, and selling them cheaper than we sell the 4th Edition. Are members who print or buy those books breaking any Traditions? Are those books an "outside issue"?
42. We now have two Conference-approved pamphlets ("Many Paths to Spirituality" and "The God Word") stating that atheists and agnostics can achieve lasting sobriety in AA. What Tradition(s) might someone say this conflicts with?
43. "Conference-approved" materials are AA literature, audio, and videos that were approved by elected delegates of the groups in the US and Canada, in conference with directors and staff of our three corporations. Is it okay for a group or club to sell or give away literature that is not "Conference-approved", such as Bibles, greeting cards, or psychology books? If a group prints their own original materials designed to look like Conference-approved materials, is this a problem? Which Traditions are involved in these questions?
44. Local members, serving on AA's Public Information committees, sometimes hold speaking events in public places such as high schools or libraries. Is this to help prevent people from becoming alcoholics? Is it to raise money? Are there other reasons? What Traditions relate here?
45. When sending an email to a lot of AA members, perhaps for service purposes, there are several approaches. Some people put all the email addresses in the Address of the email. Some put all the email addresses in the BCC (blind copy) field instead. Some people send the email to an email forwarder or an email group, such as a Google group, so that all group members get the email but no one can tell from the email's Address field who received the email. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? What Traditions are involved?
46. If I have a list of member names and emails, is it okay to use that list for non-AA purpose, such as inviting them to my church or my business? What if my business sells sobriety medallions and keychains? What if my business is a non-profit treatment center or sober-living environment? Can I use the mailing list to send invitations to a recovery conference, such as a sober women's conference or a sober bikers weekend? What Traditions support you here?
47. Many people don't know that it's possible to contribute money by credit card on the aa.org website. When you do, it explains that we are self-supporting, and requires you to state that you're an AA member (or it won't accept your money). Is this consistent with all 12 Traditions? Once you've answered that, you might also consider that many local AA intergroup websites accept digital donations, and some home groups are now set up to accept contributions by payment apps such as PayPal or Venmo. Is this square with the Traditions?

48. If you search for AA meetings through Google, Bing, or other search engines, there's a good chance you'll see paid advertisements for treatment centers. Should AA pay Google to display an ad for AA? Should we ask Google to display a local meeting schedule? What Traditions should we be aware of while considering this?
49. Is it okay to sell AA literature and the AA Grapevine magazine in local and online bookstores, in print or electronic form? Does it break Traditions if the store makes money on this (or if AA does)? Does it break Traditions if the store displays related items such as books from Al-Anon, NA, Hazelden, SMART Recovery, or Moderation Management? Is it a problem that people would post comments on those online pages, and in some cases, break their anonymity or make false statements about AA? What Traditions are involved in all this?
50. AA is exploring its options for social media sites like YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter. What Traditions should be brought up in these discussions? Does the situation change if AA enables comments (i.e., if the site allows people to post questions or comments directly to AA)? Would that involve different Traditions?
51. For each of these questions, say which Traditions are involved: Is it okay to tell your story on YouTube? Can you show your face or use your last name? Should you disguise your voice? Is it ok to share private details of someone else's life? Is it ok to use full names of other members or non-members? What Traditions, written in the 1940s, guide us with Internet and mobile technology? Do we need new or updated Traditions for new technology?
52. Is it okay to write or record your recovery story and sell it on Amazon? What Traditions support or oppose your position on this?
53. Someone shows up at your meeting with unusual eyeglasses, and you realize that these glasses allow them to make video recordings and post them to the Internet. What Traditions come to mind? How would you deal with this?
54. Is it okay to use last names at group business meetings or district meetings? In service, you may be asked to provide your last name to professionals – for instance, to be the AA contact for a hospital, treatment center, jail, etc. What Traditions might guide you on this?
55. In order to do AA service in some jails, mental hospitals, treatment centers, or other institutions, you must sign an agreement to follow their rules. A rule might be, for instance, that if you drive one of their clients to a meeting, you may only go directly to the meeting and directly back. You may be asked to report anyone who talks about suicide, homicide, or escape. You may be asked to provide a list of their clients or inmates who attended the meeting. Is it okay in general to sign an agreement of this type? Do you have a problem with any of these rules in particular? What Traditions are you thinking of in forming your opinion?
56. A district officer buys thank-you cards, small gifts, or lunch for district or area servants with district money, and then asks to be reimbursed for this as a service expense. What Traditions relate to this purchase?

57. Someone repeatedly attends your meeting in clothes that display controversial political or religious messages. Should your group do something about this? What Tradition(s) might guide your group here?
  
58. Your AA district or intergroup receives an invitation to join a local "interfaith" committee. This would involve participating in their monthly meeting, where representatives of local churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples gather to discuss matters of common interest. Sometimes they work together on problems of poverty, violence, public health, etc. What Traditions should come up in deciding whether to accept the invitation?