

ANOREXICS AND BULIMICS ANONYMOUS

Guidelines For Group Operation

1. First and most important, it is critical that **at least one group member be sober** in her/his eating disorder. Great harm can come to all involved if this is not the case. If everyone is still gripped by their mental obsession and is acting out with anorexic or bulimic behaviors, the group will be unable to offer hope to anyone, and especially to the newcomer. Indeed, you may drive newcomers even further away from recovery than they were before. They may leave your presence in deeper despair instead of with a flicker of hope. If no one is sober in your group, we suggest that individual members begin working with sober long-distance sponsors (see information on sponsorship below) and simply attend open meetings of other 12-Step Fellowships. (AA is usually the first choice for this purpose because of its wide availability around the world and because of the strength arising from its long history.) Once at least one person is sober, you can recommence ABA meetings.

2. What is sobriety and how do you get sober and stay sober in your eating? These questions are answered in clear and comprehensive detail in our **basic textbook**, *Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous: The Fellowship Details Its Program of Recovery for Anorexia and Bulimia*. If your group members have not yet studied this text, we strongly urge you to do so before going any further with your meetings. One complimentary copy is included with this kit of materials, and an order form for the book is also enclosed. Alternatively, ordering instructions may be found on our website. Our book includes specific information needed for recovery from anorexia and bulimia, and is always displayed prominently at meetings. We also suggest that your group use two books from the literature of AA, *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. These books were the only texts available to our pioneers, and they remain important sources of information for our youthful ABA Fellowship.

3. We have found **sponsorship** a vital tool for authentic recovery from our disease. No one heals in isolation. To effectively work the 12-Step Program, guidance from a sober and experienced ABA member is essential. Please study the detailed information on sponsorship in our textbook (pp 157-161) before selecting a sponsor. Clearly, if your ABA group is the first one in your area, you will require long-distance sponsorship from an ABA member living in a place where meetings are already established. To obtain information about potential long distance sponsors, call the CSA office (number above) and ask to speak with Joan.

4. In conducting meetings, we recommend using the entire **Preamble For Meetings** found on pp 142-148 of our textbook. This will give your meeting focus and direction. A master copy of the Preamble is included with this kit (unless one was already sent to a founding member of your group); our groups in Edmonton photocopy this (double-sided on colored paper) so people attending the meeting can follow along as the chairperson reads. Some groups also invite newcomers to take a copy of this home, to peruse later. We suggest making your meetings 75 or 90 minutes in length, unless the group is very small (60 mins is ample in that case). For a discussion topic, you may want to choose a section from the book and read it aloud before opening the meeting for sharing. "Cross-talk" (i.e. responding directly to what others have shared, giving advice, answering questions others have posed as they shared, or interrupting them when they have the floor) is not advisable and should be strongly discouraged. The chairperson can gently and compassionately stop a member who is engaging in cross-talk. Remember that this person is usually oblivious to what they are doing, and knows no better. Treat everyone kindly; we are *all* very sick people!

5. To be affiliated with ABA, we strongly advise **adherence to the 12 Traditions**, guidelines for group operation that were hammered out by AA in the early years of its existence. We earnestly entreat all groups to thoroughly study these Traditions, which are covered in some detail in our text (pp 166-183) and in the AA book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. You may decide to set aside one meeting per month wherein a tradition is read and discussed (e.g. Tradition 1 in January, Tradition 2 in February, and so on). We have learned that when groups fail to abide by the Traditions, they flounder and eventually collapse.

6. You may wish to place a **notice about your meeting** on our website and in a public place in your city or town (e.g. a community centre bulletin board, a notice board in a hospital or treatment centre, the foyer of a public library, the entryway of a grocery store, an information board in a local shopping mall, etc.) Such notices should be simple and discrete (e.g. "Do you suffer from an eating disorder? You are not alone. Hope is available through the 12-Step recovery program of Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous. Call for information about meetings.") You could type the first name and phone number of your group's contact person at the bottom of the page, possibly on detachable strips that people can tear off. *However, publicizing a phone number in this way is solely at the discretion of your group members and is done at your own risk! Please consider carefully before doing so.* If you decide not to publicize a member's phone number, you could simply place details about the meeting time and location on the notice itself, provided you are meeting in a neutral location and not in someone's home.

7. We strongly suggest that your group designate **service positions** and fill these from your sober members. Some examples include: a Group Representative who maintains contact with GSA; a meeting Chairperson; a group Secretary who maintains a list of members and their phone numbers; a Treasurer who collects the 7th Tradition funds, keeps an accurate account of it, and pays the group's bills; Coffee-preparer; someone to serve as Greeter at the door when newcomers walk in; Birthday Coordinator to arrange cards, medallions, and birthday cakes when members are celebrating the anniversary dates of their sobriety; Literature Coordinator to ensure ABA books and pamphlets are available for purchase at meetings. Obviously, if your group is small and quite new at this time, some of these service positions may be unnecessary, or may be combined and filled by one person. We recommend rotation of group members through these positions, for two reasons. First, sharing the responsibility for group work gives everyone an opportunity to reap the immense rewards that flow from service. Secondly, regular rotation protects the group from one or more people dominating it and thus violating Tradition 2. Some examples of suggested terms for your service positions are: Group Rep, 2 yrs; Treasurer and Secretary, 1 yr; Coffee Person, 1-2 mos; Meeting Chairperson, 1 month. You may also decide to require a certain length of sobriety for some positions, particularly Treasurer.

8. Vitally important to your group's health is the principle of the **group conscience** as outlined in Tradition 2. ABA believes that a collective Higher Power speaks through the group conscience in all decision-making at the group level. Thus, the group conscience is a sacred spiritual principle and should *be* regarded with the utmost respect. A healthy group is never "governed" by one member or a small clique of members; all group members have an equal voice in the group's decisions, and any member may request a group conscience meeting if they wish to re-examine the group's policy on any issue. Here are some examples of matters determined by group conscience: Are meetings open or closed? Does the group want only some meetings open (e.g. birthday meetings once per month)? How long should the meeting be? What prayers should be used to open and close the meeting? How are newcomers welcomed? Should there always be a "Speaker to the Newcomer" even if no one indicates they are new or coming back? Does the group want to place a time limit on sharing? If so, how will this be imposed? How are topics selected at discussion meetings—by the chairperson or from the floor? Should some meetings be "Speaker Meetings" where a member or outside guest is invited to share their story for the entire meeting time? What does the group want to do with the funds flowing in through the 7th Tradition collection? Should coffee and tea be served at meetings? What tokens does the group want to use to acknowledge months of sobriety? These

are only a few examples of the many questions to be deliberated and decided by majority vote or by consensus, thereby putting the group conscience to work.

On a related note, once your group has developed a meeting procedure through its group conscience, we suggest compiling a simple document entitled, ^Guide to Chairing Our Meeting)) type it up, laminate it, and leave it in a box or bag with your other meeting materials to make it available to everyone. In this way, anyone can take the initiative to chair your meeting. This printed guide usually refers the chairperson to the "Preamble For Meetings" in our textbook, and also spells out other things that your group wants to be stated at meetings.

9. A group's health and cohesion is enhanced by **regular business meetings**, usually every 1-3 months. This is the forum to arrange the filling and rotation of service positions, hear a financial report from the group Treasurer, discuss group policies and practices such as those mentioned above, make changes in group policy as necessary, deal with group problems as they arise (e.g. outgrowing the current meeting space, insufficient funds to pay your rent), and air grievances in a respectful manner. The business meeting may be held before or after a regular ABA meeting or may be called on a separate day. All group members are strongly encouraged to attend.

10. We invite your group to send **monetary donations to the GSA** as you are able. How much you send and how often should be determined by group conscience. This money is used to support the growth of ABA worldwide, and contributing financially allows your group to be connected with the whole. All contributions are welcome, no matter how small, and are put to the use of ABA as a whole (e.g. publication of ABA literature, printing and distribution of materials like this "New Group Package," gifts of books to new groups, and the postage to send them out to groups around the world). Since all these endeavors require funding, contributing to the CSA ensures that your group remains self-supporting through its own contributions (Tradition 7).

We encourage groups not to hoard money in excess of a "prudent reserve" (e.g. the amount of 2-3 months rent), since experience has shown that accumulation of money has often proved detrimental to group health.

All donations are strictly accounted for and receipted by the CSA Treasurer, whose books are audited each year in advance of the CSA Annual General Meeting in March. Donations may be sent by cheque or money order in your own currency and made payable to "General Service Association of ABA." *Please do not send cash through the mail.*