

SUGGESTED
MEETING
FORMAT
WITH
BASIC
READINGS
FOR
VIRTUAL
MEETINGS



Families Anonymous®

FAMILIES ANONYMOUS®
SUGGESTED MEETING FORMAT FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Administrator places the following information in the Chat Room:

- URL for the FA® website: familiesanonymous.org
- URL for free downloads of FA material: familiesanonymous.org/literature/free-downloads
- URL for FA e-store, to purchase literature: familiesanonymous.org/shop
- URL for FA donations: familiesanonymous.org/donate
- Email address for Zelle donations to the FA World Service Office: donate@familiesanonymous.org
- [Optional] Email address for Zelle donations to the local FA group _____

[Alternatively, the above information may be made available to the group via email or screen sharing.]

~~ THE LEADER STARTS THE MEETING ~~

We welcome you to the regular [day] _____ meeting of the [city or group name] _____ group of Families Anonymous. My name is _____, and I will be your leader for this meeting.

Just a reminder to please mute the audio on your line until it is time for you to share. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, please be in a location away from nonparticipants.

Also please enter your first name and phone number in the Chat Room of this meeting if you wish to share this information with others. If you would like to lead a meeting or are willing to sponsor someone, you may also specify that in the Chat Room.

If there are any visitors or newcomers present, please unmute your line and introduce yourself, by first name only. **WELCOME!** If you are willing to stay online for a few minutes after the meeting concludes, we will have someone available to greet you and answer any questions you may have.

Are there any second- or third-timers? **WELCOME BACK!**

Announcements: Are there any announcements by the secretary?

Will the treasurer please report?

Are there any other reports or announcements?

Thank you.

Families Anonymous is primarily for those who have known a feeling of desperation concerning the destructive behavior of someone very near to them, whether caused by drugs, alcohol, or related behavioral problems. When you come into this room you are no longer alone, but among friends who have experienced similar problems. We will respect your confidence and anonymity, as we know you will respect ours:

**WHOM YOU SEE HERE, WHAT YOU HEAR HERE,
WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE, LET IT STAY HERE.**

Usually the longer we continue to struggle alone, the more our thinking becomes confused. We have found that working our Twelve Steps enables us to live comfortably—in spite of unsolved problems—and often removes obstacles to the recovery of those who brought us to this program.

Here we begin to understand that to be of real help to others, we must first be willing to be helped ourselves. We ask only for the wisdom to see ourselves as we really are; for the courage to do something about our own lives, with the help of a Power greater than ourselves as we understand this concept; and for the grace to release with love those we are concerned about and cease trying to change them.

We believe we are dealing with a family illness that can be treated by a change of attitudes. We try to study our literature with an open mind, attend as many meetings as possible, and exchange phone numbers with other members for help between meetings.

Families Anonymous has basic readings that form the foundation of our Twelve Step program. They are read by different members at every meeting to remind us of the message they carry.

(We now go into the readings, which the Administrator will place on the screen as each is announced.)

(The Leader will call on people to read.)

1. **INTRODUCTION** (Optional)
2. **ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER** (formerly ABOUT DRUG ABUSE)
3. **FOUR DESTRUCTIVE FORCES**
4. **THE TWELVE STEPS**
5. **THE TWELVE TRADITIONS**
6. **HELPING**

THANK YOU!

These readings, along with other material, are available as free downloads on the Families Anonymous website. Our Administrator has placed the link in the Chat Room. There is also a large selection of excellent FA literature for sale on our e-store; the Administrator has placed that link in the Chat Room as well. Many of us have our favorites and will be happy to assist you after the meeting in recommending a few pieces that will help you understand the program and start you on your road to recovery.

Remember that even when you're not at a meeting, your program travels with you. So when you feel the need for support, phone another member. You can find that information in the Chat Room.

As a reminder, we will not take a break during this meeting, as we would normally do when we're face to face.

If anyone would like to lead a meeting, remember any piece of FA literature, such as a bookmark, a Step or Tradition, or a reading from *Today A Better Way* (TABW), makes an excellent topic for discussion. Different members lead our meetings; we encourage everyone to take a turn. It is empowering to lead a meeting no matter how long you have been attending FA. Remember when leading, that the topic should be no longer than 10 minutes and is meant only to begin the group discussion.

Anything you hear at this meeting is strictly the speaker's own opinion. If a member says something that you cannot accept, remember that he or she is merely speaking from personal experience—and not for Families Anonymous. There will be time at the end of the meeting for anyone who has not yet shared. **BEFORE WE BEGIN**, we encourage everyone to feel free to enter into the discussions and ask questions about the program.

So that everyone will have a chance to contribute, we avoid Crosstalk, which is defined as:

- Speaking without being recognized by the leader
- Carrying on a separate, one-on-one, side discussion during the meeting
- Questioning or counseling another member

IF THERE IS A NEWCOMER: You have shown courage by taking the 1st step and attending your first meeting. We encourage you to attend at least six meetings before deciding if FA is the program for you. *[If newcomers are present, read Letter to the Newcomer (#6001) or the January 1 reading in TABW.]*

[Optional:] Let us pause for a moment of silent prayer or meditation.

~~ **THE LEADER CONDUCTS THE MEETING** ~~

[Optional:] The leader may start with a short personal story about his or her experience in FA and how the program has changed him or her. For instance, “What I was like before FA, what happened, and what I’m like now.”

IF THERE IS A NEWCOMER, ASK: Newcomers, do you have any questions or wish to share? *(Allow for any questions or comments.)*

After the newcomer finishes speaking, leader says: We’re glad you chose to join us tonight. **Please remember that we will have someone available to meet with you after the meeting if you stay online at the end.**

Is there anyone else who hasn’t spoken or would like to share now?

~~ **GRATITUDE: PASSING THE VIRTUAL BASKET** ~~

The principles of Families Anonymous are found in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Our Seventh Tradition states that each group should be fully self-supporting. While no dues or fees are required for membership, our voluntary contributions are used to pay for meeting costs and literature. They also allow us to help carry the message of our program to others through our continued support of FA’s World Service Office. Your generosity is encouraged and greatly appreciated.

As we don’t pass the basket online, anybody who wishes to contribute to Families Anonymous may do so online at FamiliesAnonymous.org and then click the “Donate” link.

We have also implemented Zelle as a virtual form of “passing the basket”. When setting up the recipient, use **donate@familiesanonymous.org** as the email address to which the funds will be sent.

[Optional:] If your group has set up a method for contributing to your local group, indicate that here.

If you have any questions, please reach out to our Treasurer, _____. Thank you for supporting us.

~ CLOSING ~

The very essence of our program is that everything is merely suggested. Our progress can be made in our own time and in our own way. As this is an anonymous program, we ask all members and visitors to respect our anonymity. The stories you hear are told in confidence and should not be repeated outside the meeting. They are told so that we might better understand this program and ourselves, and to give encouragement to new members. Thank you all for participating. It is our sharing that makes this program meaningful and helpful. When you leave here, take with you those thoughts that will be most helpful to you and leave behind those that you cannot accept.

And now, for those who care to join us, we will say the Serenity Prayer. *[Wait for Administrator to put it on the screen.]*

**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.**

[End with (optional):]

**KEEP COMING BACK.
IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT, IT WON'T IF YOU DON'T.
SO WORK IT, YOU'RE WORTH IT!**



INTRODUCTION

(Optional Reading)

FAMILIES ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of people whose lives have been affected by the use of mind-altering substances or related behavioral problems of a relative or friend. Any concerned person is encouraged to attend our meetings—even if there is only a suspicion of a problem.

Many recovery programs are available for our addicted loved ones, when they are ready to seek help and recovery. However, FAMILIES ANONYMOUS is for us: the parent, spouse, brother, sister, or other emotionally involved relative or friend.

In the beginning we seem to be most helped by listening to those who have shared similar experiences and found some answers. By attending meetings, studying the literature, talking to other members, and working the Twelve Steps of this program, suddenly or gradually our situation begins to look different to us and our reactions to it begin to change. What is happening? We are learning to face reality with comfort, and our emotional growth is being encouraged. These changes in ourselves can create an atmosphere in the family that promotes recovery.

Our authority in FAMILIES ANONYMOUS is a Power greater than ourselves, as we understand this concept. Our groups are self-directed; leadership is rotated among our members, who assume various responsibilities that keep the group functioning. No dues or fees are required for membership. We use first names only in order to uphold FA's tradition of anonymity that helps protect the privacy of everyone concerned.

Our program is open to all, regardless of our various beliefs—or lack of belief. A member's acceptance of a "Power greater than ourselves" is strictly a personal, private choice. We are not affiliated with any religion, sect, political entity, or institution. Our primary purpose is to practice the principles of FAMILIES ANONYMOUS so we may help ourselves by helping others with similar problems.

We have found that working on ourselves is the most important single thing we can do to help those we care about. In this process, **many find that they learn a better way to live.** There are no rules or "musts" in our program, except perhaps one: "Keep coming back!"



Families Anonymous, Inc.
701 Lee Street, Suite 670, Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508
(847) 294-5877 • fax (847) 294-5837 • (800) 736-9805 (USA only)
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ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

(formerly ABOUT DRUG ABUSE)

Not everyone who comes into this program is concerned about the use of drugs. However, in today's world, all of us need to confront this issue. Also, those with an emotional problem often turn to drugs in search of a solution to their difficulties.

We have learned that substance use disorder (drug abuse, drug dependence, or addiction) is a matter of **illness**, not a moral issue. For the purposes of this program, the label is not important.

Dependence on drugs can be psychological or physical—or both. The compulsive use of drugs or alcohol does not indicate a lack of affection for the family. Even when they **know** what will happen when they take that first pill, drink, or fix, drug-dependent persons may still do so. This is the “insanity” we speak of in regard to this illness.

Using drugs as a means of escaping reality is a symptom of emotional problems. However, little emotional growth is likely to take place until the individual stops using chemicals to try to solve his or her problems of living. Switching from one mind-altering substance to any other, including alcohol, is only likely to prolong the illness, not arrest the problem.

There is nothing that we as individuals can do to prevent another person's use of drugs, but we have learned that there is much we can do to avoid **standing in the way** of his or her recovery. We have found that the most constructive approach is to deal with our own reactions and to learn new ways of coping with **our** problems. When we accept substance use disorder as an illness and understand that there **is** something we can do to help both ourselves and the situation, we become ready to learn a better way to live.



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FOUR DESTRUCTIVE FORCES

To enable our meetings to be truly constructive, it is necessary to recognize and repress four destructive forces that can cause dissension and eventually destroy the group.

The first destructive force is the discussion of any religion. Our program is open to all, regardless of our various beliefs, or lack of belief. Each member's understanding of a Higher Power is strictly a personal, private choice.

The second destructive force is gossip. We are here to share **our** feelings, attitudes, and reactions to our situation—to help us in applying the principles of Families Anonymous® to our **own** lives. Careless discussion of other people's personal difficulties is contrary to the principles of our program. What we say here—stays here!

The third destructive force is dominance. FA® is based on suggestion, interchange of experience, and rotation of leaders. No member should direct, assume authority, or give advice. Our leaders are chosen, not to govern, but to serve.

The fourth destructive force is dwelling on the past. Harboring painful thoughts and speaking endlessly about hurtful times with our loved ones block our recovery. Besides being detrimental to our personal progress, continuous behavior of this type within the meeting, week after week, is destructive to the group's progress and unity. Such behavior can lead us back to the Third Destructive Force, which is dominance.

Instead, we let go of the past by listening to other members, reading our FA literature, and learning new ways to change our actions and attitudes, thereby improving our lives.



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FAMILIES ANONYMOUS® TWELVE STEPS

We have found that our success in this program is determined by how well we accept and apply the following suggested Steps:

1. We admitted we were powerless over drugs and other people's lives—that **our** lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, **as we understood Him**.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.



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FAMILIES ANONYMOUS[®] TWELVE TRADITIONS

We keep what we have only with vigilance. Our group experience suggests that the unity of Families Anonymous depends upon our adherence to these Traditions:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity.
2. For our group purposes there is but one authority—a loving God, as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. Individuals concerned with another's abuse of drugs or related problems of living, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves a Families Anonymous group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is a concern about the use of mind-altering substances or related behavioral problems of a relative or friend.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or FA[®] as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose: to help those concerned with someone who may have a problem of drug abuse or dependence. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of this program, by encouraging and understanding those affected by this illness, and by welcoming and giving comfort to the families and friends of individuals with a current, suspected, or former drug problem.
6. Our family groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Families Anonymous Twelfth Step work should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. Our groups, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to the groups they serve.
10. Families Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, TV, and any other public or private media. We need guard with special care the anonymity of our members as well as those of other recovery programs.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.



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HELPING

My role as helper is not to *do* things for the people I am trying to help, but to *be* things; not to try to control and change their actions, but through understanding and awareness, to change my reactions.

I will change my ...

- negatives to *positives*;
- fear to *faith*;
- contempt for what they do to *respect* for the potential within them;
- hostility to *understanding*; and
- manipulation or overprotectiveness to *release with love*, not trying to make them fit a standard or image, but giving them an opportunity to pursue their own destiny, regardless of what their choice may be.

I will change my ...

- dominance to *encouragement*;
- panic to *serenity*;
- the inertia of despair to the *energy of my own personal growth*; and
- self-justification to *self-understanding*.

Self-pity blocks effective action. The more I indulge in it, the more I feel that the answer to my problems is a change in others and in society, not in myself. Thus, I become a hopeless case.

Exhaustion is the result when I use my energy in mulling over the past with regret or in trying to figure ways to escape a future that has yet to arrive. Projecting an image of the future—and anxiously hovering over it for fear that it will or it won't come true—uses all my energy and leaves me unable to live today. Yet living **today** is the only way to have a life.

I will have no thought for the future actions of others, neither expecting them to be better or worse as time goes on, for in such expectations I am really trying to create or control. I will love and let be.

All people are always changing. If I try to judge them, I do so only on what I **think** I know of them, failing to realize that there is much I do not know. I will give others credit for attempts at progress and for having had many victories that are unknown.

I, too, am always changing, and I can make that change a constructive one, if I am willing. I CAN CHANGE MYSELF. Others I can only love.



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SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS & GROUP POSITIONS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

I. Special Considerations for Getting the Most out of Online FA Meetings

Online Families Anonymous® (FA®) meetings have the same essential components as face-to-face meetings, in that we recite our basic readings, discuss the Steps, and share our experiences, strength and hope about finding serenity despite dealing with the disease of addiction. But online meetings are very different from face-to-face meetings in that everyone is not together in the same room: each of us is in our own space, at home, and on camera.

Because of that, it takes a bit of care to ensure that we look and sound like our natural, in-person selves so that we get the most out of the meetings. Here are a few basic tips to keep in mind:

1. Watch your camera angle. Set up your computer or smartphone so that the camera is at or slightly above eye level and angled down toward your face. Sit close enough to your computer or smartphone that your full face, neck and shoulders fill up the middle third of the screen and there's not too much space above your head. This will present you in a natural-looking, level, full-face pose. The same rules apply if you're attending as a couple; place the camera at or slightly above eye level, and be sure the image of the two of you fills most of the screen. Check your background, too: if it's too cluttered or "busy," that makes it harder for your FA colleagues to pay attention to you.
2. Make sure you are well lit. It's best to have soft, diffuse light directly in front of you so your face isn't in shadow but isn't too bright or "washed out" either. Facing toward windows with natural daylight could work for daytime meetings. For evening meetings, good artificial light can be as simple as a desk or table lamp set behind or just to one side of your camera, at approximately eye level, so it shines toward your face. You can check out your lighting in advance of the call by turning your smartphone camera around and looking at yourself. Walk around the house and try different locations to find the place where you look best, then set up and take the online call from there.
3. Minimize distractions. Just as we silence our cellphones in face-to-face meetings to prevent interruptions, we should do the same when attending a meeting online. In addition, if there's a pet in your house, or there are children or others who are not attending the meeting with you, you should take steps beforehand to be sure they do not interrupt during the meeting. If possible, take the call in a separate room and ask to not be disturbed during that time. If you find you need to get up and move around, turn your camera off to avoid distracting others.

4. Present yourself as you would in person. Dress as you would if you were attending your usual face-to-face FA meeting. When you speak, look into the camera on your computer or phone, not at your image on the screen or at the faces of the other attendees displayed there. This will enhance their feeling that you're sharing directly with them.
5. Follow the rules. The person leading your online meeting will lay out the ground rules, such as muting your microphone unless you're sharing, checking the Chat room for information about literature and donations, and the like. Please pay attention and follow the rules carefully to ensure that everyone's online experience is as rewarding as it can be.

The following are suggested ground rules:

- All but two people should be muted during the meeting: the leader and the person sharing. Others may mute/unmute themselves, depending on if they're sharing or not. The administrator of the meeting may have the capability to mute everyone in case there is background noise.
- When it's time for a specific reading, it is very helpful for the leader to share his/her screen with the group so everybody can follow the reading online.
- It's best when group members take turns reading. The leader can call on specific people to read, or attendees can volunteer to read, whichever works better for the group.
- Ask for volunteers to stay online after the meeting to check in with any newcomers, to address questions or comments, and to coordinate delivery of a Welcome! (newcomer's) kit or any other materials of interest. Announce this at both the beginning and the end of the meeting.

Using the Chat area:

- Ask people to enter their first name and phone number under Chat if they are willing to be contacted between meetings. This is a convenient way for newcomers to take someone's number.
- Use Chat for people to express interest in leading an upcoming meeting.
- Use Chat for members to express interest in either being a sponsor or seeking a sponsor.
- Use Chat to point people to the URL for Families Anonymous donations and to provide Zelle payment information. Zelle can be a convenient method for participants to make donations during the meeting.
- Use Chat to point people to the URL for Families Anonymous literature.

II. Group Positions in the Virtual Format

Below are additional duties of group positions in the virtual format. Depending on the size and needs of the group, the group has the option to combine positions.

Administrator – This is a new position. Alternatively the secretary can perform these tasks.

- Sends the URL to members each week for logging on to the virtual meeting. May also include the topic for the week so members can prepare in advance.
- Forwards the “Suggested Meeting Format” to newcomers.
- Adds the following information to chat:
 - FA website: familiesanonymous.org
 - Free downloads of FA material: familiesanonymous.org/literature/free-downloads
 - FA e-store for literature purchases: familiesanonymous.org/shop
 - Donations to the World Service Office via Zelle: Email donate@familiesanonymous.org (See [#5008V-8](#) “Using Zelle to Donate to the Fellowship.”)
 - Other ways to donate: familiesanonymous.org/donate
 - *[Optional]* Email address for Zelle donations to this FA group # ___: _____
- Opens the webpage for the meeting, and admits members as they come on.
- Asks for volunteers to lead the next meeting.
- Closes the webpage at the end of the meeting.

Treasurer

- Assists members if they have questions about how to donate.
- Reports the status of finances and donations to the group on a regular basis.

Literature Chair

- Mails new-member packets to newcomers.
- Recommends literature for specific issues, and assists members with questions.

Greeter

- Greets members as they come on the call.
- Makes newcomers feel welcome.
- Stays on the call after it closes to answer questions for newcomers.



USING ZELLE TO DONATE TO THE FELLOWSHIP

Zelle is a computer application that enables you to electronically send and receive money to and from people you know. Once you enroll in Zelle, you only need the preferred email address or mobile phone number of the intended recipient to donate money.

Zelle is offered by over ninety (90) banks and credit unions in the United States, including Capital One, Wells Fargo, Chase, and Bank of America. To get started, enroll in your bank's mobile banking app or access your bank account online.

Once you are logged in to your account, follow the directions to select the "Zelle" service. To send money using Zelle, simply select the recipient from your device's contacts (or add a new recipient's email address or U.S. mobile number), enter the amount you'd like to send, review, then hit "confirm." For Families Anonymous® (FA®), you would use donate@familiesanonymous.org.

The money you send goes directly from your bank account to the recipient's bank account (even if they are in two different banks), and the funds are available in minutes. There is no fee; there are no checks to write; and the transaction is secure. Once you send money to a particular person or entity (such as FA), their information is saved in your Zelle account, so making future donations is easy: log in to your online banking account, go to the Zelle service, click on the FA name, and enter the amount you want to donate.

Now that many former face-to-face meetings are being held online, a number of local FA groups have also adopted Zelle as a way to virtually "pass the basket." Please take a few minutes now to explore how you can use your online banking app and Zelle to conveniently support your local FA group and the World Service Office.

For additional information or support, go to <https://www.zellepay.com/>.



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