

# **Families Anonymous, Inc.**



## **WSOF-14 Group Secretary's Handbook**

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## **Introduction**

This document presents basic guidelines for Families Anonymous® (FA®) groups and for members who are serving as group secretaries. The ideas herein have been compiled from the personal experiences of many FA secretaries over the years, and, like most things in FA, they are suggestions only. We welcome your comments. If you have questions or need more help, please contact the FA Group Outreach Committee at [GO@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:GO@familiesanonymous.org).

## **General Tips for the Group**

### ***Contacting FA***

The FA World Service Office (WSO) may be contacted by:

- phone at (847) 294-5877 or (800) 736-9805
- email at [famanon@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:famanon@familiesanonymous.org)
- fax at (847) 294-5837
- mail at 701 Lee Street, Suite 670, Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508

### ***First Order of Business***

When an FA group is first formed, it must register immediately with the WSO. Thereafter, it must re-register each year prior to April 1 and whenever there is a change in group secretary or meeting information. There are two ways to register a group:

- online at the FA website ([www.familiesanonymous.org/members/registration](http://www.familiesanonymous.org/members/registration)): Please note there is a different form for your group's initial registration (WSOF-23) and for its re-registration (WSOF-24).
- by mail, email or fax: A "New Group Registration Form" (WSOF-23) is included in each Starter Kit (#8003), which is available for free from the WSO upon request, and in each Full Literature Pack (#8001) and Full

Literature Pack–Spanish (#8001S), which may be purchased through the FA literature catalog. Fill out that hardcopy form, and return it to the WSO via mail, email or fax.

A re-registration reminder is emailed by the World Service Board to group secretaries in January each year. If a group secretary does not have an email on file with the WSO, a reminder will be sent via postal mail. Both the registration form and the re-registration form are also available for download from the FA website, as stated above.

Please provide all the required information. The “Instructions” section on the forms is for the meeting’s room number, a particular entrance to be used, the location of parking, virtual meeting information, and other information useful to attendees.

Include a contact phone number and possibly an email address for your group. This information will appear in the FA meeting directory.

Also provide, separately, your group secretary’s full name, email address, and telephone number. This will be used only by the WSO and WSB for sending FA information to your group. It will *not* appear in any FA directories, or be shared with the public at large, or be used in any other way that could compromise anyone’s anonymity.

It is essential that your group be registered with the WSO. This is the only way that your group can be included in our meeting directories, be covered by FA’s liability insurance policy, receive important communications from FA on a regular basis, and be eligible to vote at FA’s annual business meeting.

### ***Members’ Handbook***

Read *The FA Tools of Recovery: A Handbook for Members* (#5001). This is an invaluable guide for helping groups and members work the FA program. Follow its principles, and refer to it often. Also encourage each member of your group to buy and use their own copy of the handbook.

## ***Sharing Service Within Your FA Group***

A common pitfall of group secretaries is to try doing everything themselves. This practice is very unhealthy for the group.

FA's First Tradition states the importance of group unity in achieving personal progress for the greatest number of the group's members. Unity and personal progress are more likely to become realities when everyone shares in giving service to the group.

The phrase *trusted servant* does not mean that one person waits on everyone else. FA encourages periodic rotation of the secretary, treasurer, and other group-chair positions, optimally taking place every six months but at least once a year. Rotation of leaders can go a long way toward avoiding the Third Destructive Force, which is dominance.

Issues of *service* and *unity* can be ideal topics for a meeting, especially prior to a business meeting at which rotation of leaders is to be discussed. *Today A Better Way*<sup>™</sup> (#1015) has a number of readings on these topics, including on pages 81 (March 21), 142 (May 21), 191 (July 9), 247 (September 3), and 342 (December 7).

Below are descriptions of group positions, which can be combined, depending on the size of your group. In addition to the secretary position(s), groups may designate a treasurer, a program chair, a literature chair, a refreshment chair, a welcome chair, and so on. Groups whose members share in performing service to the fellowship are more apt to grow and prosper.

### **Group Secretary**

- helps the group run smoothly
- stays mindful of other group positions, and offers assistance if needed
- notifies the WSO of any changes in secretary or meeting information
- re-registers the group annually, either online at the FA website or by calling the WSO
- updates the WSO, on a timely basis, regarding changes in group contact information (This includes the name, phone number and email address of the current group secretary and whether meetings are being held in-person, virtually, or hybrid.)

- receives email and mail communications from the WSO and the WSB, and relays these to the rest of the group

### **Back-up Group Secretary**

- serves as group secretary in an emergency or when the group secretary is out of town or otherwise unavailable
- often takes over the group secretary position when ready to do so

### **Group Treasurer**

- keeps the financial records of the group, including accounting for all income (derived from “passing the basket” and, if appropriate, from FA literature sales) and for all expenses (rent paid or donated for an in-person meeting room; fees paid for an online platform; refreshments at in-person meetings; FA literature purchases; donations to the WSO; etc.)
- sends regular or periodic donations to the WSO, per the group’s decision (Many groups send donations to the WSO, observing the tradition of remaining forever poor.)
- manages the group’s checking account, if any (For more information, refer to the “Financial Records” section of this document.)
- makes regular announcements in virtual meetings regarding the ways to make individual donations to the WSO, and makes sure this information is included in the “chat” feature

### **Back-up Group Treasurer**

- performs the functions of the treasurer when the treasurer is absent

### **Program Chair**

- schedules meeting leaders, and encourages different members to assume the role of meeting leader each week
- maintains a calendar or sign-up book (if the group so chooses) that shows whether a meeting is a Step meeting, a Tradition meeting, a topic meeting, or a literature meeting, and that lists the members who have volunteered to lead or been asked by the program chair to do so (Information on how to lead a meeting can be found under “Service – The Sixth Tool: Tips for Leading Meetings” in *The FA Tools of*

*Recovery* [#5001] and in a special flyer available from the Group Outreach Committee [GO@familiesanonymous.org].)

### **Literature Chair**

- orders FA literature from the WSO
- oversees the display of FA literature at in-person meetings
- in the “chat” feature of virtual- or hybrid-meeting platforms, includes the url (i.e., the website link) where the FA literature catalog is displayed on FA’s estore, and answers any literature questions
- organizes and collates the FA literature items that the group may have chosen to include in the *Welcome!* (#6002) packets given or mailed to newcomers at or after their first meeting (Note: Only FA literature may be used, displayed, sold, or given away at FA meetings.)
- attaches a blank Greeter/Contact Card (#6002) to the front of the *Welcome!* (#6002) packet or to other materials handed out to newcomers

### **Greeter**

- ensures that newcomers, whether attending in person or virtually, are greeted promptly and made to feel as comfortable as possible during their first few meetings
- takes newcomers “under their wing” by giving or mailing them a *Welcome!* (#6002) packet (put together by the literature chair) and a *Greeter/Contact Card* (#6006) on which is written the greeter’s first name and phone number
- provides newcomers with the group’s phone list, either separately or as part of the *Welcome!* packet
- asks newcomers for their contact information (i.e., phone number and email address)
- calls newcomers after they have skipped one or two meetings, to chat and let them know they are missed (This relationship sometimes leads to sponsorship.)
- passes along newcomers’ phone numbers and email addresses to the phone list chair and the email chair; does the same for changes in current members’ contact information
- Note: This position can be rotated frequently or assigned casually whenever a newcomer arrives. (Members who hand out the *Welcome!*

[#6002] packet fill in their own name and phone number on the *Greeter/Contact Card* [#6006].)

### **Public Information (PI) Committee Chair (and Members)**

- attends local functions and distributes FA literature
- makes copies of and distributes FA flyers (such as *Are You At Your Wits' End?* [#7014])
- sends press releases and meeting information to free newspapers
- undertakes other activities to inform the community about FA (*Spread the Word About FA* [#7007] offers a variety of suggestions for increasing community awareness of FA. For more guidance, contact FA's Public Information Committee at [PI@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:PI@familiesanonymous.org).)

### **Phone List Chair**

- maintains a list of current phone numbers of all group members, using first names only (Be sure members have given permission to be included on the list.)
- gives everyone a copy of the phone list to facilitate their calling each other between meetings

### **Email Chair**

- maintains a group email list
- uses this list to share important information with group members, including announcements of group- or world-service opportunities, weekly notices and links to the group's virtual or hybrid meetings, and notifications of special group meetings, and for forwarding copies of the *Serenity Messenger* (FA's bimonthly newsletter) and other WSO and WSB communications
- always uses "blind copy" (bcc) to protect members' anonymity, since email addresses often include last names

### **Refreshments Chair**

- purchases and prepares coffee, tea and/or snacks for in-person meetings, as determined by the group's needs



## **Group Contact**

- receives phone calls and/or emails from prospective members and other interested parties
- always keeps in mind that the group contact:
  - represents the public face of FA on each call and in every response to an email;
  - communicates to the caller that the contact person is responding only as an FA member and never under the guise of a counselor or any other type of professional (even if the group contact is one);
  - tries to confine the conversation to the FA program; the location, day and time of the group's meeting; and the group contact's own personal experiences; and
  - stays alert for individuals who might initiate improper conversations pertaining to counseling, professional referrals, asking for advice, and so on.
- considers obtaining a free generic email address (such as faXXXX@gmail.com, with XXXX being the group's FA ID number or location) so as to allow for easy rotation of this position
- directs people with Internet access to the FA website ([www.familiesanonymous.org](http://www.familiesanonymous.org)) for more information about the FA fellowship
- considers keeping on hand a list of other Twelve Step fellowships that might more appropriately meet callers' needs as well as information about local health or social service agencies (Note: FA never recommends or endorses commercial institutions [such as rehabs or hospitals], individual physicians, psychologists, counselors, religious institutions, clergy, etc.)

# **Your FA Meetings**

## ***Who Conducts FA Meetings?***

A group's meetings are led by its members, who are responsible for conducting all aspects of the meetings. Outside professionals are never allowed to "get into the act." Experience has shown that groups will not grow in the program if the meetings are conducted outside FA guidelines. Although many professionals attend FA meetings, they do so only as FA members and never in their professional capacity.

## ***Meeting Format***

Meetings can be held in person at a venue such as a community center, place of worship, or other public space; online using a meeting platform such as Zoom or GoToMeeting; or a hybrid combination of both. Any changes in how the group meets should accommodate the needs of the majority and are best decided by members at a business meeting. The FA website offers free downloads of the meeting format for in-person and virtual meetings under the "Literature" tab and "Free Downloads."

## ***Rotation of Meeting Leaders***

Rotation of leaders is critical for group health. It gives all members a chance to serve, even if they are fairly new to FA. Some groups ask the secretary or a program chair to be responsible for scheduling a leader for each meeting. Other groups ask at each meeting for volunteers to lead future meetings.

The purpose of leading a meeting is to share our own successes and challenges as we work on our recovery. Being a meeting leader has nothing to do with how well or how poorly the people who have brought us to the program are doing. Leading the meeting is a form of healthy, Twelfth Step service, with our personal growth depending, in part, on our willingness to share with others our experiences, strengths and hopes.

## ***Keep It FA at the Meeting!***

Follow an approved FA meeting format. Our five basic readings (“About Substance Use Disorder” [formerly “About Drug Abuse”], “The Four Destructive Forces,” “The Twelve Steps of FA,” “The Twelve Traditions of FA,” and “Helping”), as well as the optional “Introduction,” should be read aloud every week. (These readings can be found in *The Families Anonymous Basic Pamphlet* [#1001] and in *Suggested Meeting Format with Basic Readings* [#5003 and #5003V].)

This helps foster group unity and a shared sense of purpose. It encourages members to redirect their attention to the principles of the FA program, focus on their own recovery, and be open and receptive to the topic of the meeting to come. This approach has worked for thousands of meetings over many decades, keeping members on task and providing “presence of mind” concerning the Traditions that guide our groups.

## ***Meeting Topics***

FA literature can bring a meeting to life. (Refer to FA’s literature catalog for a complete listing of FA literature offerings.)

Use *Today A Better Way* (#1015), *The Twelve Steps of FA* (#1004), and *The Twelve Step Workbook* (#1019) as study guides. They are three of the most important pieces of literature to help members work and practice the FA program.

Find meeting topics in “The First Tool” chapter of *The FA Tools of Recovery: A Member’s Handbook* (#5001) and in other FA publications, such as *The Twelve Promises of FA* (#2011), *What Do I Say?* (#1026), and *Setting Boundaries: A Very Loving Thing to Do* (#1028).

Turn to *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010) to study the Traditions.

## ***Preventing Crosstalk***

Straying from the meeting topic, or allowing “crosstalk” to occur, hinders individual recovery. Encourage members to focus on “how I use the program” rather than “the problem that brought me to the program.” The responsibility for doing this actually

falls to the leader, but the secretary may sometimes need to give a gentle nudge by referring the group to the “Meetings” section of Tradition Four in *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010) or to the *Crosstalk* (#5009) table tent meant to be displayed at each meeting.

### ***Meeting Roster (Telephone List)***

Maintain a sign-in sheet for the first names and phone numbers of attendees. This sheet can be used for many purposes: letting people know about a special meeting or speaker, reaching out to members who have not attended in some time, or giving to newcomers as a contact list.

### ***Focus on Recovery, Not “Who’s to Blame”***

During our meetings, we keep the discussion centered on our recovery through the FA program. Little is gained by trying to shift blame for “the problem” onto society, the Internet, schools, police, government, or any other entity.

### ***Literature Display and Sales***

Put FA literature—and *only* FA literature—on your literature display table. Outside materials should never be displayed or mentioned during the meeting, since doing so would detract from the message of the FA program and be likely to confuse members, especially newcomers. Any discussion of outside literature, if necessary, should occur only before or after the meeting.

Prices that groups charge for FA literature are a matter of Group Conscience. Some groups sell literature at their cost plus a small increment to cover what they paid for shipping and handling. Other groups sell literature at just their actual cost. Still others provide some literature for free, especially to newcomers. A group’s policy on literature sales is strictly a group decision.

Virtual groups may consider encouraging members to purchase literature online at [www.familiesanonymous.org/literature/](http://www.familiesanonymous.org/literature/).

## ***Outside Speakers***

Use outside speakers infrequently, if at all. Outside speakers need to be selected carefully and must be familiar with the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, especially Tradition Six and Tradition Eleven. Remember that the primary purpose of the meeting is to help members understand and work FA's Twelve Step program, not to entertain them.

## **Business Meetings (Group Conscience)**

Business meetings are an important part of a thriving group and provide opportunities to make plans and get things organized. Reviewing problems, planning public information efforts, selecting and interviewing guest speakers, determining the group's financial support of the WSO, and appointing delegates to FA's annual business meeting and to any meetings of a local intergroup\* should be done without interfering with the regular meeting.

If the group is small, a short business meeting might take place before or after the regular meeting or during the meeting break. Longer business meetings can be scheduled as a potluck supper or at some other time convenient for most members to attend.

The group secretary is responsible for keeping the whole group apprised of the outcome of a business meeting, especially if there is news or information from the WSB or, if it exists, from the local intergroup or national service board.\*

Final decisions about matters dealt with at a business meeting should be the result of a vote or be reached by consensus among the group's members.

Should controversy occur, always use the Twelve Traditions as your guide. FA's *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010) provides practical advice based on the principles of the FA program that keep our fellowship thriving in continuity and strength. Should you require further guidance, contact FA's Group Outreach Committee (GO@familiesanonymous.org) or the WSO.

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\*An intergroup is an organization of geographically related groups that supports and assists its member groups. A national service board is an organization established in a country outside the United States that serves member groups in that country, much as the WSO serves groups within the U.S.

# Stay Organized

## ***Financial Records***

The Treasurer should keep the group's financial records up to date at all times and have them available for review by any group member upon request.

The WSB advises groups to not keep large amounts of funds in the group treasury. If funds remain after allowing for expenses and setting aside a prudent reserve, they should be donated to the WSO or the local intergroup or national service board.

If your group finds it necessary to maintain an amount in excess of \$250 in the treasury (such as when planning for a convention), opening a group checking account is highly advised so as to avoid any financial problems. Do *not* open the account in the name of a group member. Rather, your group should obtain a federal tax identification number from the Internal Revenue Service. This process is free, takes only a few minutes, and may be done by phone, by mail, or online. For more information, see the FA or IRS website, or contact the WSO.

## ***Group Contacts***

Communication between your group and the FA fellowship as a whole is vitally important. Keep in touch with the WSO. Generally speaking, the group secretary serves as the primary contact with the WSO.

## ***The FA Group Outreach Committee: A Resource for Your Group***

The WSB has given the Group Outreach Committee responsibility for assisting new and established groups and for working hand-in-hand with them to help them grow and prosper.

Feel free to contact the committee any time your group needs assistance or has questions. The committee may be reached directly at [GO@familiesanonymous.org](mailto:GO@familiesanonymous.org) or via the WSO. We would welcome hearing from your group periodically, even if you are not experiencing problems. Feel free to ask questions concerning the fellowship as a whole.

## ***Mail from the WSO***

Printed correspondence from the WSO and WSB is mailed to the current or last-known group secretary. If the post office cannot deliver mail, it will be returned to the WSO at an additional cost to the fellowship. We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to keep the WSO up to date with the group secretary's contact information!

If the group secretary provided an email address when registering the group, that person will receive occasional email communications from the WSO containing important information for the group. The group secretary will also receive an emailed copy of the *Serenity Messenger* (as well as it being available online to all members). A change of email address should be reported promptly to the WSO, so email correspondence is not disrupted.

All correspondence from the WSO, the WSB, or WSB committees should be read aloud to the entire group, both when it is received and for the duration requested.

## ***FA Meeting Directories***

The WSO maintains FA's U.S. and worldwide meeting directories online. Information about your meetings is contained within one of these directories and is the avenue through which potential new members will contact you.

When a group changes its meeting place, day, time, or contact information, its group secretary is responsible for notifying the WSO, as quickly as possible, by submitting a group re-registration form. There is perhaps nothing worse for a community member in crisis to reach out to FA for help and to find a dark meeting room or an invalid contact phone number or email address.

It is important that the group contact phone number be that of a member willing to take calls and talk to newcomers. Check to be sure it is correct. The contact number should *not* be the number of the place where the group meets; besides being unacceptable to expect people at meeting sites to answer FA phone calls, it could give the erroneous impression that FA is affiliated with the facility.

## ***Nearby FA Groups***

Think about keeping in touch with other FA groups nearby. If you are within a reasonable driving distance of another group's meetings, it would be worthwhile for you or other members of your group to visit and exchange information and encouragement. If not, try to stay in contact via telephone or email. If there is sufficient interest, you and the other group(s) could consider joining together to form an intergroup. For information on forming an intergroup, contact the WSO.

## ***Supporting the Fellowship***

Encourage group members to support FA as a whole and, especially, to reach out to new groups in your area. Ways to support the fellowship include writing about personal experiences in recovery for the *Serenity Messenger*, suggesting new literature for consideration by FA's Literature Committee, volunteering to serve on the WSB or one of its many committees, and giving financial support through individual and group donations. Contributions can be made by check mailed to the WSO, through Zelle, or online at [familiesanonymous.org/donate](https://familiesanonymous.org/donate).



## **Newcomers: FA's Lifeblood**

Newcomers keep our groups strong and healthy. They are perhaps the most important people who enter our meeting rooms. They are suffering, as we once were, and should be welcomed and made to feel as comfortable as possible.

Remember that your good work is what helps newcomers find a warm, friendly atmosphere at their first few meetings.

### ***Welcoming Newcomers***

The greeter (or another group member) should acknowledge new attendees as they enter the meeting room, handing them a *Welcome!* (#6002) packet or, at the very least, a *Letter to the Newcomer* (#6001). Explain that our program is for them, not for the person or problem that brought them to the meeting.

Remind the meeting leader to read the January 1 reading (“To the Newcomer”) in *Today A Better Way* (#1015), as recommended by the FA meeting format.

### ***Suggested Handouts for Newcomers***

Some groups purchase FA's *Welcome!* (#6002) folder specifically for newcomers. Suggested inserts could include:

- *FA's Do's and Don'ts* (#2001)
- *An Open Letter to My Family* (#2007)
- *About Substance Use Disorder* (formerly *About Drug Abuse*) (#2010)
- *Helping* (#2003)
- *The Twelve Promises of Families Anonymous* (#2011)
- *Letter to the Newcomer* (#6001)
- *To the Concerned Family Member or Friend* (#6003)
- *Do You Need FA?* (#6004)
- *A New Door Opens* (#6005)
- the group's telephone list or the names and phone numbers of several members willing to take Twelve Step calls between meetings
- a *Greeter/Contact Card* (#6006) on which the greeter's name and telephone number have been written

# Growing the Group

## *Spreading the Word*

Your group's public information program for "spreading the word" about the group and the FA fellowship is an ongoing project of great importance. It will help your group increase attendance, attract new members, and potentially lead to the formation of new groups while revitalizing your existing group.

Consider reaching out to schools, librarians, places of worship, police, judicial officers, medical professionals, counselors, local newspapers, and television and radio stations.

A number of effective public information tools may be downloaded from the FA website or ordered from the WSO. These include but are not limited to:

- *Spread the Word About FA* (#7007)
- *FA and the Professional Community* (#7010), including seven individual handouts geared toward specific professionals
- *FA Fact Sheet* (#7012)
- *Are You Torn Apart?* (#7009)
- *Are You at Your Wits' End?* (#7014)

Supplementary materials are also available at no cost from FA's Public Information Committee (PI@familiesanonymous.org).

## *Television / Radio / Social Media*

Consult the WSO concerning anonymity issues before agreeing to appear on television, radio, or other media platforms. Also be mindful of personal and group anonymity prior to using social media.

## *Public Information Service*

Planning and implementing your group's public information campaigns should involve as many group members as possible. This Twelfth Step service is a

wonderful way to enhance each member's recovery, and it provides the group with a cohesive bond of mutual compassion and understanding.

### ***Keep Coming Back***

Especially when your group is young, this statement may apply to just you and one or two other members. Keep your meetings going. Be patient, and be there, every week, rain or shine, holidays included! Do your public information work. Don't be discouraged if weeks or months go by with few new members. FA groups are built slowly as people learn about our program and gain confidence in what it can do for them.

**Please remember to make a new secretary aware of this document by referring that person to the FA website or passing along your copy.**