

Families Anonymous Inc.



#5018/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.

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
- 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 reregister 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): Please note there is a different form for your group's initial registration and for its reregistration.
- by mail or fax: A "New Group Registration Form" (WSOF-23) is included in each Starter Kit (#8003), available for free from the WSO upon request, and in each New Group Pack (#8001) and New Group Pack–Spanish (#8001S), available for purchase through the FA literature catalog. Fill out this form and return it to the WSO via mail or fax.

A reregistration form is provided in the World Service Board's (WSB's) annual mailing to group secretaries in January of each year. Both the registration form and the reregistration form are also available for download from the FA website.

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, 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, to 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 his or her 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*TM (#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.
- Reregisters the group annually, either online or by mail, and provides the WSO with current contact information for the group and the secretary.
- 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.
- Takes over the group secretary position when ready and at his or her discretion.

Treasurer

- Keeps the financial records of the group, including accounting for all income (from “passing the basket” and, if appropriate, from FA literature sales) and for all expenses (rent paid or donated for the meeting room; refreshments; 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.)

Back-up 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 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 the meetings.
- Organizes and collates the FA literature items that the group may have chosen to include in the *Welcome!* (#6002) packets given to newcomers at their first meeting. (Note: Only FA literature may be used, displayed, sold, or given away at FA meetings.)
- Attaches 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 are greeted promptly and made to feel as comfortable as possible during their first few meetings.
- Takes newcomers “under their wing” by giving them a *Welcome!* (#6002) packet (put together by the literature chair) and a *Greeter/Contact Card* (#6006) on which they have written their first name and phone number.
- Asks for newcomers’ phone numbers, and calls them after they have skipped one or two meetings, to chat and let them know they are missed. (This relationship sometimes leads to sponsorship.)
- Reviews the group’s phone list with newcomers when the meeting has ended.
- Note: This position can be rotated frequently or assigned casually whenever a newcomer arrives. (The member who hands out the *Welcome!* (#6002) packet fills in his/her 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.)

Phone List Chair

- Creates 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, or provides a copy to the Email Chair for distribution to the group.

Email Chair

- Creates a group email list (on his/her own computer), to be used for sharing important information among group members regarding world

- service or special group meetings or for forwarding copies of *The Twelve Step Rag*, FA's bimonthly newsletter.
- Always uses "blind copy" (bcc) to protect members' anonymity, since email addresses often include last names.

Refreshment Chair

- Purchases and prepares coffee, tea and/or snacks, 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 FA each time he/she takes a call or responds to an email.
 - Communicates to the caller that he/she is responding only as an FA member and never as a counselor or any other type of professional (even if he/she is one).
 - Tries to confine the conversation to the FA program; the location, day and time of the group's meeting; and his/her own personal experiences.
 - 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) for more information about the FA fellowship.
- Considers keeping on hand a list of referral information for other Twelve Step fellowships that might more appropriately meet callers' needs as well as for 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.)

Please remember to make a new secretary aware of this document by passing along your copy or referring him/her to the FA website.

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 meeting. 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.

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 Drug Abuse, The Four Destructive Forces, The Twelve Steps, The Twelve Traditions, and Helping), as well as our optional Introduction, should be read aloud every week. 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. Use *Today A Better Way* (#1015) and *The Twelve Steps of FA* (#1004) as study guides; they are two 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). (Refer to FA’s literature catalog for a complete listing.)

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 focused 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 for FA literature are a matter of Group Conscience. Some groups sell literature at their cost plus a small increment to cover shipping and handling. Other groups sell it 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.

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.

* 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 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. He/she will also receive an emailed copy of *The Twelve Step Rag* (as well as it being available online to all members).

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 Directory

The WSO maintains both online and printed versions of FA's U.S. and worldwide meeting directories. 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 reregistration 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 associated 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 Twelve Step Rag*, suggesting new literature for consideration by FA's Literature Committee, volunteering to serve on the WSB or one of its many committees, or giving financial support through individual donations.

Newcomers: FA's Lifblood

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 all your good work is for nothing if newcomers do not find a warm, friendly atmosphere at their first few meetings.

Welcoming the Newcomer

The greeter (or another group member) should welcome newcomers 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 suggested by the FA meeting format.

Suggested Handouts for the Newcomer

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 Drug Abuse* (#2010)
- *The Twelve Promises of FA* (#2011)
- *Letter to the Newcomer* (#6001)
- *To the Concerned Family Member* (#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 has written his/her name and telephone number

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, 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)
- *FA Fact Sheet* (#7012)
- *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

Many times this statement applies to you and one or two others when your group is young. Keep your meetings going, and do your public information work. Be patient and be there, every week, rain or shine, holidays included! 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.