



Starting a New Families Anonymous® Group



WHO CAN START A GROUP?

It takes only one concerned person to establish a new Families Anonymous® (FA®) group. In fact, many people who start FA groups have no prior Twelve Step program experience.

The only things needed to get a group going are the following:

- a physical location and/or an online platform for meeting regularly;
- a *New Group Starter Kit* (#8003E), an e-resource containing a collection of useful tools that will help you embark on this new project;
- *Suggested Meeting Format with Basic Readings* (#5003), an essential guide for leading in-person, virtual or hybrid meetings;
- some additional FA literature pieces to use during your meetings and possibly sell or give away to attendees;
- a plan for announcing the existence of your new group, with help and guidance available from the following resources:
 - *Spread the Word: Raising Awareness and Planning Public Outreach* (#7007E), an e-resource tool loaded with tips for any FA group, regardless of how new or long-established it is, and
 - FA's Public Information Committee, whose members have a wealth of PI experience and are always eager to be of help (contact them at PI@familiesanonymous.org); and
- a few potential members.

You can find FA's literature catalog, free downloads, and e-resources on the FA website in the Literature drop-down menu.

If you have never attended an FA meeting and have no FA groups nearby, you may find it helpful to attend one of our virtual meetings. A directory of all our meetings is available at <https://familiesanonymous.org/meetings/meeting-directories/>.

WHERE MIGHT I FIND A SUITABLE MEETING PLACE?

For in-person meetings, suggested locations include schools, places of worship, addiction treatment facilities ("rehab"), hospitals, public buildings, and retirement homes. The building where you meet should be well lit, easy to find, and in a central location with parking available. The building manager should be told the nature and purpose of the FA program as well as the fact that our 1½- to 2-hour meetings are traditionally held weekly, including holidays. Some venues are willing to designate a locked closet where your group can store literature and supplies between meetings; otherwise, your group secretary might need to transport those items to and from your meetings.

Several platforms are available for holding online meetings and phone meetings. (Certain platforms may be accessible to your group, for a reduced charge, directly through Families Anonymous. Contact the World Service Office [WSO] for more information.) As with physical meetings, you should plan for these meetings to last up to 1½ to 2 hours.

HOW MUCH SHOULD A MEETING ROOM COST?

Your search for an in-person meeting location will probably lead you to a community-spirited person or facility that might offer a room at little or no cost. If there is no set fee, you should explain that, in accordance with our Seventh Tradition (i.e., “every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions”), the group would like to make a small contribution toward the use of the room. Later, once your group becomes established, your members might consider increasing the amount of your contribution.

Groups that meet online are likewise expected to follow FA’s Seventh Tradition. Sometimes a member will sign up and pay for an online-platform account and then be reimbursed by the group. In other groups, members with their own personal accounts volunteer to set up the meetings and send out invitations; although they incur no additional expenses and do not require reimbursement, the group can “be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions” by sending a predetermined amount to the World Service Office in lieu of what they would otherwise pay to the online platform.

HOW DO WE FINANCE THE GROUP?

Although no dues or fees are required for membership, FA groups follow the Twelve Step tradition of asking for voluntary donations at each meeting. Donations are used for paying the group’s rent and/or online-platform subscription, for buying refreshments (if meeting in person), and for purchasing FA literature.

In-person groups literally “pass the basket” around the room during their meetings.

Online groups “pass the basket” virtually, with donations being made in various ways as determined by the group. For example, members can mail checks or money orders, in any amount they choose, to the group’s treasurer; or they can donate directly to the WSO using a credit card, debit card, or other online-payment method, as explained on the Donate page of the FA website.

If your group eventually accumulates more money than needed to meet expenses, you can pass along the excess to your local intergroup or national service board (if any) and/or to the WSO. In this way you will be helping to support the work of those entities in servicing the fellowship.

WHAT FA LITERATURE WILL WE NEED?

FA offers a wide variety of recovery literature. The full catalog is on our website at www.familiesanonymous.org. You can purchase literature online through the website’s e-store, or you can fill out a hardcopy order form and mail it to the WSO.

Anyone may subscribe to FA’s Learning Library, which is a subscription service giving access to virtually all FA literature items, including materials needed for holding meetings. The Learning Library can be accessed through the FA website.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER SUPPLIES?

For in-person meetings, you may wish to provide light refreshments (as allowed by the venue management), a way to keep track of time, a collection basket, and legible signs directing newcomers to your meeting room (see *Meeting Location Signs* [#5015]). All supplies used for the meeting (beverages, etc.) can be paid for out of group funds.

HOW IS THE MEETING CONDUCTED?

The *Suggested Meeting Format with Basic Readings* (#5003) makes it easy to lead a meeting.

The “meeting leader” (a different person each week) usually selects a specific topic for discussion.

- The topic may be one of the Twelve Steps or Twelve Traditions; the Serenity Prayer; an FA slogan; or a key word or phrase, such as “release with love,” “acceptance,” or “enabling.”
- A meeting topic can also be selected from the index of *Today A Better Way*™ (#1015); from one of FA’s five “basic readings”; or from another piece of FA literature.
- *FA Tools of Recovery* (#5001) has a lengthy chapter (“The Sixth Tool”) devoted to tips for leading meetings as well as a wealth of ideas for suggested discussion topics.

At in-person meetings, chairs are typically arranged in a circle, or around a table, or in some other configuration that enables easy communication among members. In some groups, the discussion proceeds around the room, with each person having a chance to speak in turn. In other groups, members wanting to share are asked to raise their hands and wait to be recognized by the meeting leader.

At virtual meetings, members generally stay muted unless they are speaking. Depending on the group’s preferences, members might raise their hands into the camera, or click on the Chat or raised-hand option, to indicate their desire to speak; or they might wait for a break in the conversation to unmute and ask to speak; or they might be called upon directly by the meeting leader. It is preferable that attendees turn their camera on in order to encourage the sense of community that typically characterizes FA meetings.

Regardless of which method is used, participation in discussions is strictly voluntary. The leader’s role is to proceed according to the agreed-upon meeting format, oversee presentation of the meeting topic, and encourage an orderly participation by any attendee who wishes to share—all while ensuring that everyone follows FA’s understanding of *crosstalk*. Members take turns leading the meetings from week to week; this avoids having any single member control the group.

WHAT MAKES A “GOOD MEETING”?

Members make a meeting “good” by being willing to share their personal progress, successes, shortcomings and overreactions in daily-life situations. In this program, we help each other *not* by giving advice, offering criticism, or endlessly discussing our problems, but rather by honestly sharing our own experiences, challenges, strengths and hopes.

HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE NEWCOMERS TO “KEEP COMING BACK”?

It is FA members’ compassion and interest in each other that allow newcomers to sense that they will be understood and supported as they work on their recovery. One member (often the group secretary) can be responsible for providing newcomers with a sampling of literature that introduces them to FA but does not overwhelm them with too much information at the outset.

Literature selections often come from this list:

- *Families Anonymous Basic Pamphlet* (#1001)
- *An Open Letter to My Family* (#2007)
- *Letter to the Newcomer* (#6001)
- *To the Concerned Family Member or Friend* (#6003)
- *Do You Need FA?* (#6004)
- *A New Door Opens* (#6005)
- one or more FA bookmarks, all perhaps placed in a *Welcome!* folder (#6002)

In virtual meetings, where handing out literature samples is problematic, newcomers can be directed to the FA website where they can print out selected items from the Free Downloads page or purchase literature through the e-store.

There are additional ways of helping newcomers feel welcome, such as by providing them with a list of members’ first names and phone numbers; suggesting (or handing out, for free) other FA literature that they might find meaningful; and announcing, as the basket is being passed, that at their first meeting they are the group’s guests. For more ideas, refer to *Growing Your FA Group: A Tip List for New and Established Groups* (#5011).

WHAT IS FA’S WORLD SERVICE OFFICE (WSO)?

The WSO is the worldwide headquarters of Families Anonymous, Inc. **It is supported entirely by donations from our members and member groups and by proceeds from the sale of FA literature.** The WSO serves all FA groups—domestic and international—and carries the message of our program to people everywhere who are concerned about the use of mind-altering substances or related behavioral problems of a relative or friend.

HOW DO WE REGISTER OUR GROUP?

As soon as you have settled on a physical location or online platform and decided on a day and time for your meetings, you have enough information to register your new group with the WSO. There are two ways to register:

- Fill out the Group Registration Form included in the *New Group Starter Kit* (#8003E), and mail or fax it to the WSO
- Register online by going to our website, selecting Members→Registration→New Group Registration, and filling in and submitting the onscreen form.

By registering your group with the WSO:

- Your meeting will be included in FA's meeting directory.
- You will receive important information about the fellowship on a regular basis, including notifications when our newsletter, *Serenity Messenger*, is available for download.
- You will find opportunities for service and decision-making within the organization.
- Your group will be eligible to vote at FA's annual business meeting.
- Your group will be covered by FA's liability insurance policy.

By re-registering your group annually, and by informing the WSO in the interim of any changes regarding your meeting day, time, location, or contact person, you can ensure that your meeting information on the FA website will always remain up to date. The easiest way to re-register your group is by logging onto the FA website, selecting Members→Registration→Existing Group Re-Registration, and completing and submitting the form.

Please note that anonymity (as stated in our Twelfth Tradition) is the spiritual foundation of our program. Your personal information will *not* be used outside the WSO or be given or sold to any outside organization.

DO YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

If so, or if you are puzzled about something you have read, FA's Group Outreach Committee will be happy to assist you. The Group Outreach Committee may be reached by email at go@familiesanonymous.org or by contacting the WSO. Remember that there are no foolish questions!

Thank you for your interest in FA. We wish you well.

WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS IMPORTANT FOR YOURSELF AS WELL AS FOR OTHERS!



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