

AA. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

recovery

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS[®] is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

*Copyright © by A.A. Grapevine, Inc.;
reprinted with permission*

Copyright © 1989
Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.
475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115

Mail address: Box 459, Grand Central Station,
New York, NY 10163

www.aa.org

A.A. and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic

What it was like

Many of us doubted there was even any point trying not to drink. Things had gone so far downhill it looked like nothing was going to change — ever. We knew drinking had something to do with the hurt we felt inside, but we also knew it seemed to be the only thing keeping us from falling apart.

It seemed impossible to think that things had gotten so out of hand. Not long ago we were reaching for alcohol as a source of enjoyment, a healer of pain.

“I had always been what I would call a heavy drinker, though for most of my early and middle twenties I really felt that I had it under control. Why not drink, I reasoned. After all, I didn’t have the family responsibilities that some of my straight friends had. Why shouldn’t I enjoy myself.”

Alcohol was the source of good times, of fun — in the bars, in the clubs, drinking right from the bottle. It was fun. And it made life more exciting, more dramatic. Sure we occasionally drank too much, but somehow it always seemed to work out.

“At 17 I had no conception of what it meant to plan a career or to take care of myself. It seemed so easy to pick up a drink at a party. I was afraid my female friends would reject me if I told them I was a lesbian. I did not know any other lesbians then. I did not go into a gay bar until I was 20.”

For some of us our alcoholism developed slowly, but others of us seemed to be alcoholics right from the start.

“I was an instant alcoholic — drinking purely for the effect it had on me, and I remained a practicing alcoholic for 28 years.

“During that time I foolishly spent many thousands of dollars, destroyed many relationships, gave up my education, received two drunk driving charges, and spent ten days in a county workhouse. I never voluntarily stopped short of drunkenness.

“As humiliating and destructive as these things were, they did not seem so bad to me at the time. They were merely a way of life — the way of life of an unfortunate alcoholic. It could have been so much worse and I knew it. However, what I did not know is that I had lost a sense of who and what I was, and had alienated myself from everyone in my world. That was the major cost of my alcoholism. “

Even though we might not have been able to see it or to say exactly when it happened, somewhere along the line, alcohol had turned on us. We no longer knew what its effect on us would be. It wasn't fun anymore. The lights were beginning to go out, one by one.

No longer were we center stage. Instead we were passing out and waking up full of fear, not knowing where we were or who we were with. We started wondering what was real in our lives. Could this be happening to us?

“As time went on I took a job in a small, quiet town. I did some part-time work and I was staying busy — so busy I didn't have time to be alone and face myself.

“Five years later I was transferred to a larger, more prestigious office where I felt more open about being gay. But I was not doing well, and I was unable to control myself. I was creating crisis where there could have been calm.

“Then I was arrested twice within three months for driving while intoxicated. My house of cards was tumbling down. Not even alcohol was my friend anymore. I had abandoned self, friends and God. All that remained were intensive blackouts, the alcohol that my body demanded and the despair that accompanied each drink.”

It started to make more and more sense for us not to drink at all, but we didn't even know where to begin.

There was a solution

“I truly believed I could not emotionally survive alone, and so I attached myself to lovers with an extraordinary level of dependence. I was terrified of being abandoned, and the bottom line of each of these relationships was that I would do anything to prevent these lovers from leaving me. Self-esteem and self-respect were unknown to me. I felt worthless and so I acted out accordingly.

“Of almost equal importance was the necessity to keep up appearances, I tried desperately to control my drinking. Each day I would vow that I was not going to drink, but no matter how hard I tried I always lost the battle. There was no doubt in my mind that I was a drunk. All the evidence was in, and it was incontrovertible; but I was helpless to change it. I had tried for five years with absolutely no success.

“Then one night — a night no different from thousands of others — I was drunk, crying, and crawling around on my bedroom floor. I was so tired, sick, miserable, and defeated that I just couldn’t hold it together anymore. I didn’t have the energy to care anymore, and for the first time in my life I sincerely asked for help. The help came that night and it has continued to come, whenever I have been willing to ask. That night is also the last time I had a drink.”

Many of us had heard of A.A., but had always thought, “Well, I’m not *that* bad. I don’t need to do anything about my drinking, yet.” But slowly we began to realize that we needed help. We couldn’t beat alcohol on our own.

“Finally, I had my last drunk. I drank vodka with diet soda and took pills. That last drunk almost cost me my life, and I ended up in an intensive care unit.

“The insanity of the disease is something else. When my doctor came in to see me I told him that if he let me out I would do it all over again. This prompted a transfer to the psychiatric ward. I remained in a psychiatric setting for six weeks after that, making ceramic cups and ashtrays.

“Once I started coming to I realized that I was lucky. By that I mean lucky to have a disease that could be treated by working the A.A. program. Some other people are not that lucky. It was in the psychiatric hospital that I accepted the fact I am an alcoholic. A trip through the psych ward is not a road that I recommend, but it was something I apparently needed to do.”

Once over the initial high hurdles, though, there was at least a glimmer of hope.

“The day I called A.A., I believed that I was losing the only thing I had left that meant anything to me — my lover. I have since come to realize that it’s difficult, if not impossible, to stay sober for anyone else. But at that time I had my first taste of what A.A.s call the bottom, and I reached for the phone book.

“I’ll never forget that first phone call: the fear, the mental confusion, the uncertainty. I was hurting, both physically and emotionally in the aftermath of yet another terrible drunken confrontation with my partner. I felt as if I had reached the end and had nothing left to lose. The voice on the other end of the phone took my name and number and told me to hang on for a few minutes; she would have someone call. And someone did call, a man from my town. He told me his name, said that he was an alcoholic, and asked me if I would like to go to a meeting that night.

“When Joe came by that night, my worst fears were confirmed. He was an older man, fiftyish, driving a station wagon and wearing a baseball cap. Though I was immediately persuaded that we had nothing in common, I soon found him so unassuming and so uncanny in his remarks about drinking that I found myself relaxing and even managed to add a few words to the conversation.

“When we arrived at the meeting place, I was led into a room containing a complete cross-section of our town: men and women, young and old, working people and professionals, students and housewives. It’s hard to put into words the feelings that went through me.

“By listening to the men and women discuss their alcoholism frankly and openly, I came to believe that I, too, was suffering from the same disease. Hardly any seemed curious about my private life, they were satisfied with whatever I cared to share with them about myself. A few weeks into the program I determined to ask one of my new friends to be my sponsor. I blurted out that he should know that I was gay before giving me his answer. I remembered that while he seemed a little surprised by my declaration, he didn’t hesitate even a moment before accepting. I learned in A.A. that we cannot afford to be judgmental. As alcoholics, our very lives depend on our acceptance of and willingness to help newcomers, regardless of their backgrounds.”

The support that we find in A.A. meetings is the bond which ties us all together. Since the beginning, A.A. groups have traditionally welcomed anyone with a drinking problem and many gay and lesbian members feel very much at home in any A.A. group. There are those of us, however, who feel more comfortable in gay groups, where for a time we find it easier to identify as an alcoholic or to be open about certain personal issues.

“I refused to go to the gay groups because I did not want to be identified as a homosexual. Because of this, and not being able to let anyone really know me in A.A. (as this would mean saying I was gay), I did not make any real progress my first six months in A.A. I tried to get drunk twice, but for some reason was not able to drink more than four or five beers each time.

“I finally went to a gay group and a man came over and talked to me after the meeting. He became my first sponsor. He was able to give me much of the help I needed to start on the road to sobriety.”

Recovery from alcoholism is no small feat, so we need all the help we can get. And there’s plenty of it within A.A. in whatever sort of A.A. group you choose to go to.

“Our gay and lesbian group began with two or three members, and in the past year and a half we’ve grown to five regular members. We are small, but we are recovering and acting as an inlet for men and women who are afraid that they won’t be accepted by the A.A. community because they are gay.

“Although we are a gay and lesbian group, we don’t lose sight of the fact that our primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery from alcoholism. In most respects we are no different from other A.A. groups. We no longer have to feel unique simply because we are gay. We can now concentrate on the similarities between us and other alcoholics rather than the differences.

“Initially, I thought that being an alcoholic was the worst thing that could have happened to me. But I have since learned that my disease, or, more appropriately, my recovery, is my long-awaited ticket to freedom.”

It has often been said that when one alcoholic has planted in the mind of another the true nature of his or her malady, that person will never be the same again.

“After coming into A.A. and listening to people share their experience, strength and hope, those unnamed fears began to vanish. I realized that the A.A. people understood me — something I’d been looking for all my life. That terrible apartness from the human race and the loneliness began to disappear.”

While A.A. may not have the solution to all our problems, if we are willing to follow the simple suggestions of the A.A. program, we will find a solution to our drinking problem and a way to live life one day at a time without alcohol.

“A.A. has provided the constant source of support so vitally necessary to me while I learned to trust myself. I have learned that my being a lesbian has nothing to do with my alcoholism. Alcoholism is a disease that ignores sexual orientation. I have also learned that I am capable of standing alone, and am therefore free to choose the people with whom I wish to share my life.

“That life is developing along lines that bring satisfaction, joy, love, a sense of accomplishment and a sense of peace to me. I feel capable of dealing with the disappointments and frustrations that once overwhelmed me. I now see such things as a normal part of living, not just the punishment meted out to me. This knowledge frees me to genuinely enjoy the good things when they come along.

“Today I am free of my dependency upon alcohol and my need for other people to supply my identity. Thanks to A.A., I am free to be who and what I am, and free to actively participate in my own life. There is no greater gift, and I will be forever grateful.”

Are you an alcoholic?

The list of questions which follows has helped a lot of people find out if they had a problem with alcohol. But please keep in mind that you are the only one who can say if you have a problem or not. Even if you've been told by others that you do, the important thing is that you decide for yourself.

	Yes	No
1. Do you lose time from work or school due to drinking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does drinking make your life at home unhappy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you drink to lose shyness and build up self-confidence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Do you ever get into trouble with money because of your drinking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Does it bother you if somebody says that you drink too much?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Have you ever lost friends because of your drinking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do you blame your drinking on the behavior of others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Has drinking decreased your ambition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Do you ever want a drink "the morning after"?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Do you have a hard time sleeping because of your drinking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Has your ability to work or study decreased since you started drinking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Does drinking get you into trouble in school, on the job or in business?
14. Do you drink to escape from problems or worries?
15. Do you drink alone?
16. Have you ever had a complete memory loss as a result of drinking?
17. Have you ever been treated by a doctor for your drinking?
18. Have you ever been arrested, locked up or hospitalized on account of drinking?
19. Have you ever felt guilty after drinking?
20. Do you think you have a problem with alcohol?

If you answered “yes” to three or more questions, you may be an alcoholic.

But remember, we in A.A. follow this program voluntarily. No one forces us to admit we are alcoholics. No one forces us to stay sober in A.A. We do it because we like what A.A. has to offer.

How it works

When we were new to A.A., many of us wondered: Why are these people trying to help me? What do they want from me? How much is this going to cost? When are they going to ask me to leave?

Based on the way we felt about ourselves in those early days, these were reasonable questions to ask. There weren't many other places we were so warmly welcomed, and after years of drinking we were naturally filled with mistrust. But soon we were greatly reassured when we started learning what A.A. is all about.

The Preamble

Appearing on the inside front cover of this pamphlet is a statement known around the world as the A.A. Preamble. It was written many years ago to help people understand what A.A. is and is not, and it clearly puts forth the primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous — “to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.”

We are not professionals

Some people get paid for the work they do with alcoholics. These are doctors, counselors, psychiatrists, or social workers. We in A.A. do not get paid. We are simply drunks, drunks who have found a way to stop drinking that works. We don't claim to have all the answers, but we do want to share with you what has worked for us. And we want to do that because it helps us to stay sober. We have found that in order to keep our own sobriety, it is necessary to extend our hand to other alcoholics who are still suffering.

We are not religious

Many people in A.A. talk about “God” or a “Higher Power,” but A.A. is not connected with any religion. A.A. is a spiritual program, not a religious one.

Faith is a personal thing and it is not necessary to believe in God or in any form of religion to be a member of A.A. All you need to be a member of A.A. is a desire to stop drinking.

Atheists, agnostics, and believers of all religions have a place in A.A. — provided they wish to stay away from the first drink.

We talk about it

A.A. got started by one drunk talking to another about alcohol, and the process still works. After years of hiding our drinking, fearful of being discovered, it sure did help to talk to people who knew what we were going through with booze.

We didn't have to lie anymore or cover up the way we felt about drinking. People understood the troubles we had had with drinking, and were willing to share the solutions they had found in A.A.

By asking a lot of questions, or even just by lis-

tening quietly to what others said, we began to understand how the A.A. program works.

The Steps

Many A.A. members talked about “working the Steps,” and we discovered that the Steps (which are printed on page 20 of this pamphlet) are the heart of A.A.’s recovery program, and some people referred to them as “the steps we took that led us to a new life.”

These Twelve Steps are not based on mere theory; early members of the Fellowship analyzed together just what they had done to get and to stay sober. The Steps are a summary of their experience, and are a guide toward the spiritual recovery that is now working for more than a million and a half alcoholics worldwide.

The Traditions

The more we learned about A.A. — how A.A. is not connected to any other organization, is not interested in any controversies, and has only one requirement for membership (a desire to stop drinking) — the more we could see the importance of the Traditions. Born out of painful trial and error experience in the formative years of A.A.’s development, the Traditions indicate the best possible way for A.A. as a whole to operate.

If the Steps are the heart of A.A., then the Traditions (printed on page 21) are the backbone.

Staying stopped

For some of us stopping drinking was easy. We’d done it plenty of times. But the trick was staying stopped.

Alcoholism has often been described as a mental obsession to drink coupled with a physical allergy to alcohol. What this means is that our bodies can’t handle the alcohol that our obsession condemns us to consume.

Many of us thought it was the last drop in the bottle or the last drink at the bar that was giving us all the trouble, but we learned in A.A. that once we took the first drink, we were certain to take the next one, and the next, and the next. The first drink set up the craving for more alco-

hol, and without help that craving was too much for us.

Alcoholism has long been considered a disease — a disease, however, which can be arrested by not picking up that first drink. This we do one day at a time with the help and guidance of other sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Staying stopped is what the program of A.A. is all about.

Where to find us

Alcoholics Anonymous is listed in most telephone directories; however, you can always reach us through the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Living sober

What A.A. has to offer to any newcomer who has a desire to stop drinking is a virtual wealth of experience, strength and hope. This we will gladly share with you any time you are ready. *The decision is up to you.*

What A.A. does not do

A.A. does not:

1. recruit members;
2. keep membership records or case histories;
3. do research;
4. affiliate with social agencies, though many members do cooperate with such agencies;
5. follow up on or try to control its members;
6. make medical or psychological diagnoses or prognoses;
7. provide hospitalization, drugs, or medical or psychiatric treatment;
8. engage in any controversy about alcohol or other matters;
9. provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money, or other such services;
10. offer religious services;
11. provide domestic or vocational counseling;
12. accept any money for its services or any contributions from non-A.A. sources;
13. provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials;
14. furnish initial motivation for alcoholics to recover.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—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 wherever 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 the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. 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, and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Complete order forms available from
General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS,
Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (*regular, portable, large-print and abridged pocket editions*)
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
(*regular, soft-cover, large-print, pocket and gift editions*)
EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE
AS BILL SEES IT (*regular & soft cover editions*)
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
"PASS IT ON"
DAILY REFLECTIONS

BOOKLETS

CAME TO BELIEVE
LIVING SOBER
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

PAMPHLETS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.
THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR
THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
IS A.A. FOR ME?
THIS IS A.A.
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
A.A. FOR THE WOMAN
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE
THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
INSIDE A.A.
THE A.A. GROUP
G.S.R.
MEMO TO AN INMATE
TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY
THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
A NEWCOMER ASKS
WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE
(*Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets*)
TOO YOUNG? (*A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers*)
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(*An illustrated pamphlet for inmates*)

VIDEOS

A.A.—AN INSIDE VIEW
A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS
YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE,
THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

PERIODICALS

A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future:
To place our common welfare first;
To keep our fellowship united.
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,
And the lives of those to come.

I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help, I want
the hand of A.A. always to be there.
And for that: I am responsible.