

“Anonymity is fragile; it can be broken with one finger.”

In The Past We Had....

TRADITIONAL AA

- Since its advent in 1935, Alcoholic's Anonymous, or AA as it is more commonly known, has been holding [meetings](#) where those addicted to alcohol can find support and accountability by talking to fellow alcoholics.

These meetings take place in private homes, churches and other meeting areas in just about any town across the country, as well as in most countries throughout the world.

And Today We Have....

ONLINE AA

In the mid-1980s, as home computers became the latest thing, the electronic version of the early telephone therapy began to grow.

In the beginning, **Alcoholic's Anonymous chat was cumbersome**, limited to the crude BBS and email systems then available.

As the technology advanced, so did that of Alcoholic Anonymous online meetings until today when you can access an online meeting any time of **the day or night**.

With all of the new online technologies there is a great threat to anonymity in Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA and Social Media: Can they Co-Exist?

Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, etc. When a fellowship includes the word “anonymous” in the title, it’s pretty evident that anonymity is a big deal. In fact, AA considers anonymity to be the **“spiritual foundation of all our Traditions.”** The Internet, however, has presented many challenges to anonymity in AA. More specifically, social media has led to many questions regarding the importance and expectations of anonymity. Is it possible to keep up with social media and still stay in line with the Traditions? Is it even logical to attempt, or does it go against the very nature of “social” media itself?

AA’s Position on Social Media

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The General Service Conference (GSO) of AA compiles Guidelines for its members. Because the “only requirement” of AA is the desire to stop drinking, **AA Guidelines are just suggestions** and come from the shared experiences of members. There are AA Guidelines regarding the Internet, and social media is specifically addressed. According to the **Eleventh Tradition of AA**, “names and pictures of AA members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. The Guidelines state that, “As long as individuals do not identify themselves as AA members, there is no conflict of interest.” Therefore, AA suggests that people do not identify themselves as members of AA on any social networking sites, or anywhere else online that isn’t a **password-protected forum** for AA members only.

Case in point: I belong to a long-time closed women’s AA meeting. It is password protected and no member can post from a company website. Those emails could be subpoenaed for whatever reason and a lot of women would lose their anonymity.

Identifying Yourself as an AA Member

There are many people online who publicly identify themselves as AA members, and the GSO has received many complaints regarding this type of conduct. When you identify yourself as a member of AA, you could be inadvertently identifying someone else. The only way to remain 100 percent anonymous is to never mention your affiliation with AA on social media. People who do publicly identify themselves via social media undoubtedly have no bad intentions, Many think that it’s okay to identify yourself, as long as you don’t explicitly identify anyone else. This raises the question of anonymity and AA in modern society: Does the expectation of anonymity still apply in the same way, or is it acceptable if a member chooses to identify themselves? As society changes, should the principles of AA be adapted to accommodate a more “social” culture? Is it possible or reasonable to avoid this? A good example is Facebook. There are several members who feel it ok to break their own anonymity but what that person posts in general could imply the thinking of AA members in general (i.e. politics, religion, etc.)

AA Groups and Jargon

- While some people think it’s okay to identify yourself, and some people think it’s never okay, there are also people who think it is okay only in certain situations. For example, are closed or private groups on social media okay? For example, if you create a Facebook group for AA members, is it okay and respecting anonymity if it is private? Is anything really “private” on the Internet? **The AA Guidelines also advise against posting any comments or status updates that is “AA jargon.”** Some people think that posting “AA jargon” is okay as long as the member doesn’t explicitly identify themselves as an AA member. Others think that threatens anonymity

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What's Good about Online AA Meetings?

There are some definite pros to having the ability to access Alcoholic Anonymous online meetings.

With the nature of the internet, people can access a group around the clock, every single day. Since users are from all over the globe, you will almost always be able to find another soul to chat with. Often that is all that is needed to **stave off the desire** to pick up a drink – just talking about it and having the other person understand can be a huge relief.

Writing about your desires for a drink as well as your reasons for not wanting to give in to the urge is often a **cathartic experience**. There is a lot of healing by writing things down to share with the group.

Case in point: My group has three meetings a week that members share on Newcomers meeting, tradition meeting and Sunday Big Book Study meeting. There is also a sponsor list available of women who will sponsor a member, right out of the Big Book. Many of these women do not have an opportunity to get to a meeting at all.

Additionally, there is something about the act of writing it all down that can lift a weight from your mind as it gives you an outlet to explore feelings that could be hard to verbalize. Some find it easier to write about their addiction and their journey to healing than they do to actually talk about it. That is the good news AND the bad news.

Are there Downsides to Alcoholic Anonymous Online Meetings?

Yes, there are cons to online Alcoholic Anonymous meetings.

For some people, it's that contact with other people that is what they need to keep them going. **It is far too easy** to shut oneself off from human contact and do everything from behind a computer screen. **This could lead to unhealthy emotional states** in a recovering alcoholic that could end in depression or backsliding into drinking again.

Another major con that should at least be considered is the fact that Alcoholic's Anonymous meetings are supposed to be completely anonymous – there is no record of members or attendees and you only have to give your first name.

In my group there IS a list of members but for obvious reasons: birthdays, different chairs, treasurer's address to send money to. ***On a side note our group does a split and sends money to GSO and OIAA.***

With most, if not all Alcoholic Anonymous online meetings, you will need to register with the site hosting the meetings. Most online AA meetings will only ask you for a first name but with

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all of them you must give an email and somewhere in the site's database is a record of your IP address. These two things **can be used to find your identity within a matter of a few minutes.**

(I have been a member of this group for over 20 years and we have never had a problem like that.)

In closing I would just like to say that Anonymity presents us with a huge opportunity.

Everywhere else, other than in the recovery movement, we are judged, evaluated and graded on whom the world thinks we are. By embracing anonymity as reality, we can claim our places as well-loved children of our Creator and greet one another as friends. "The great fact is just this, and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe.

The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves."--*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 25