

North East London Area Service Committee (NELASC) sexual predatory behaviour guidelines

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| Version: | Current. Live and ratified by NELASC on 30-10-23 |
| Notes: | Includes minor amends based on email requests for clarification. Further changes will need to be presented to GSRs for ratification. |
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Summary

NA members of the North East London Area Service Committee (NELASC) formed and ratified this sub-committee to explore the issue of sexual predatory behaviour and suggest guidelines to help groups to better understand the problem, raise awareness of it, and deal with it when it arises.

The guidelines are based on issues, experiences and suggestions made specifically by NA members and informed by the workshop held at the London Convention in April 2023. At heart of the guidelines is the concept of unity and NA as whole being responsible for making our meetings safe for all addicts to find recovery. And they look at the issue from the perspective of victims, witnesses, confidantes and perpetrators.

Some may find the language of victim, witness, confidant and perpetrator unsuitable or challenging. We have decided to use these words not to convey any judgement but for ease of identifying the main roles in an incident and for ease of communication. We are also mindful that all parties could be on the receiving end of unfounded allegations and have acknowledged this in the definitions below but not every time the words are used in the document.

These working definitions may help:

Victim: any party, alleged or confirmed, who was exploited, violated or harmed by another person in a sexually predatory way.

Witness: any party who was present at the incident.

Confidant: any party with whom a victim or perpetrator has confided.

Perpetrator: any party, alleged or confirmed, who has exploited, violated or harmed another person in a sexually predatory way.

The sub-committee is mindful that preventing sexual predatory behaviour entirely might be an unrealistic aim but these guidelines will help to raise awareness of what can be done, provide support for when there are issues that need dealing with, go some way to educating people on what constitutes reasonable behaviour, and give NA members a place to come to share their concerns that can't be resolved within their groups.

What do we mean by sexual predatory behaviour?

This is the working definition the sub-committee uses to help us carry out our remit:

Sexual predatory behaviour is the exploitation of someone else's vulnerabilities through physical or emotional means, including but not limited to unwanted holding, harassment, or intimidation in the interest of gaining a sexual relation with said person, through any number of manipulative means. A predatory situation arises when there is an imbalance of power and authority between the parties involved and the party on the experienced side uses his/her/their influence over the other, less experienced party for personal gain.

Considerations made while preparing these guidelines

These are some of the decisions the sub-committee made during the preparation of these guidelines.

- 1) After a group conscience we decided not to give specific examples of sexual predatory behaviour and have consciously avoided any statements that sound like one kind of incident is being ranked or compared with another.
- 2) Throughout the guidelines we have considered the support needed for all involved in an incident be they victim, witness, confidant or perpetrator.
- 3) Making false accusations about sexual predatory behaviour is particularly sensitive area and one that needs handling delicately by a group's meeting. We felt the need to acknowledge it in these guidelines without going into great detail. If what's been heard is based on hearsay, try and determine the facts – as we know, gossip is harmful and to be avoided. If there is truth in the matter and it is affecting you, a fellow or your meeting, talk to an appropriate person, sponsor or group's committee meeting.
- 4) In the Q&As, some answers reiterate points already made in response to other questions. We decided this was important as some people may go straight to specific questions rather than reading the document in chronological order.

Practical things a GSR or NA member can do

Talk about it

Sexual predatory behaviour is not a new challenge nor is it specific to NA. All over the world, particularly in places where those who suffer come seeking help, we might encounter sexual predation and sexual violence. Becoming conscious of the problem and speaking openly allows NA to better protect members and reduce the risk of these predatory situations arising in our groups.

Talking about it in a healthy, caring and productive way can help NA members to better understand the issue and how it can be dealt with. Talk with your sponsor. Talk to a GSR or member of your meeting committee. Talk about it in your home group committee meeting. Talk to a member of the sexual predatory behaviour sub-committee.

The foundation of our fellowship is one addict helping another and we can only do that by reaching out.

Safety statement at meeting

Many NA members suggested this is a good idea and some groups are already using a safety statement at their meeting. To help groups who wish to do this themselves, here are some examples that they can use to discuss at a group conscience and tailor for their own meetings – or produce a version that works for them.

Statement 1

Everyone has the right to feel safe, both in and around our meetings. NA has a duty of care to all its members and we ask that you refrain from any behaviour which might compromise another person's safety or threaten their recovery. Our message is hope and our promise is freedom. Bullying, harassment or any inappropriate or predatory behaviour do not have to be tolerated. If you feel unsafe or feel that another member is unsafe please talk to a trusted fellow or contact a member of the committee.

Statement 2

We strongly discourage any harassment, threats or disturbing behaviour before, during or after our meetings. This includes unwanted sexual, romantic, financial and religious solicitation. Our meetings are for sharing NA recovery. It is the responsibility of all our group members to help maintain an atmosphere that is safe enough for all addicts to recover. (Note: mostly an extract from 'An Introduction to NA', IP29)

Statement 3

In minimizing disruption and distractions, we can fulfil our primary purpose and give every member the opportunity to fully listen, participate and belong in our meeting.

It may be appropriate where disruptive behaviour disturbs the meeting for the secretary to pause the meeting and/or for committee members to speak with those causing disruption directly.

Everyone has a right to feel safe in and around NA meetings. This group has a duty of care towards attendees, and we ask that you refrain from any behaviour which might compromise someone's sense of safety or threaten their recovery.

This can include but is not limited to harassment, bullying, unwanted physical contact, intentionally misgendering or misnaming, or predatory behaviour.

This group takes the welfare of our attendees seriously, so if you feel unsafe or if you feel that another member is unsafe, please speak to a member of the committee.

Can the committee members raise their hands? Please speak to whichever member you feel most comfortable with.

GSRs to hold regular inventories of their meeting

Holding a meeting inventory was considered by some NA members as a loving, safe and structured way to review how it is meeting the primary purpose. The suggestion is that GSRs try to perform an inventory at their business group conscience meeting at least once a year.

Insights from the inventory could be periodically shared as part of the NELASC GSR update – this would encourage others to do it and help to share good practice and ideas.

We suggest that as part of that inventory, groups discuss sexual predatory behaviour and reflect on the measures that could be taken if it happens or action that was taken if it has happened.

Please see the [inventory guidelines](#).

Use our Questions and Answers (Q&As)

Use Q&As (see below) as the first port of call if someone experiences a problem or wishes to help raise awareness.

Sponsors to guide sponsees on appropriate behaviours

The suggestion is that sponsors can use these guidelines and read the definition of sexual predatory behaviour with their sponsees to demonstrate, encourage and, if needs be, educate them on appropriate behaviours.

Role of the home group committee during a meeting

While some home group committees have created a service commitment to deal with the safety of a meeting, these guidelines suggest two approaches:

- 1) As part of the meeting script / preamble the committee are invited to raise their hands as people who can be approached if a member has a concern about sexual predatory behaviour.
- 2) If a particular person (victim, witness, confidant or perpetrator) needs support then the home group committee hold a group conscience to agree who is best placed to have a compassionate conversation with them. This may be the individual's sponsor if they are known. If not, it is recommended that two people make the approach.

Role of the home group committee during or after a disclosure

Home group committee business/group conscience meetings are invited to consider the following if they are discussing a disclosure from an NA member.

- 1) Please take the disclosure seriously.

- 2) Listen and hear the views of everyone involved. Give the alleged perpetrator chance to respond and give their version of events.
- 3) Take care not to leak information unintentionally and be careful if using WhatsApp to communicate.
- 4) If the situation warrants it, please consider a time of quiet reflection before making a decision.
- 5) Understand that through a group conscience they have the right to ask a member who has violated the safety of a fellow member to leave or not attend future meetings.
- 6) For delicate matters like this, the committee can call for a closed group conscience i.e. committee members only.
- 7) If it is decided that an NA member is to be excluded from the meeting it is suggested that they are told face-to-face by two people.
- 8) If the meeting committee feels that they can't deal with the issue, they can seek guidance from the sexual predatory behaviour sub-committee.

We understand that initially the disclosure might happen in a different way before it gets to the committee for group conscience.

Practical things NA can do

Create new service literature that focuses on victim, witness, confidant and predator

The issue of sexual predatory behaviour is very well covered in service literature produced by NA France. We are exploring whether NA UK can adapt a version of this for its own use as we believe it was agreed at the European Delegates Convention. For those interested, the original leaflet can be seen [here](#).

We shared the NA France leaflet at LCNA and it received positive feedback on it, so we have used some of its content to inform these guidelines.

We are mindful that getting new literature developed within NA UK is a careful and rigorous process so to expedite matters our sub-committee will work with Region on its review of the existing Inappropriate Behaviour leaflet to help make sure that sexual predatory behaviour is adequately covered.

Establish permanent Area sub-committees on sexual predatory behaviour

In May 2023, NELASC ratified the sexual predatory behaviour sub-committee as a permanent one. If other Areas wish to explore this, we can provide guidance on establishing the sub-committee.

This would include the approach we took, value of the concepts, purpose and remit, service roles, and a standard agenda format. If interested, please email info.spb@ne.london.ukna.org

Workshops in other Areas

As part of the sub-committee's role to understand the views of NA members we ran a workshop at LCNA 2023. For those who wish to run a similar workshop in their own Area, the resources we used are available for [download](#). For further information on how to run the workshop, email info.spb@ne.london.ukna.org.

Questions and answers (Q&As)

These Q&As have been developed in response to the questions and concerns raised by NA members.

1. What is sexual predatory behaviour?

This is the working definition the sub-committee uses to help us carry out our remit:

Sexual predatory behaviour is the exploitation of someone else's vulnerabilities through physical or emotional means, including but not limited to unwanted holding, harassment, or intimidation in the interest of gaining a sexual relation with said person, through any number of manipulative means. A predatory situation arises when there is an imbalance of power and authority between the parties involved and the party on the experienced side uses his/her/their influence over the other, less experienced party for personal gain.

2. Why is it a problem?

Sexual predatory behaviour causes serious harm to the victims and impacts the fellowship as a whole. Our experience shows that relapse is a frequent and sometimes deadly consequence that may result from sexual predatory behaviour. And not just for victims but also witnesses, confidantes and perpetrators. In addition, it diminishes the atmosphere of trust and love that is necessary for carrying the message of recovery and making meetings a safe place to be. Not only does this behaviour damage our unity, it also inhibits us from carrying out our primary purpose.

3. What can I do about the problem as a whole?

Please take personal responsibility for NA unity and see the 'practical things a GSR or NA member can do' section above.

The sad reality is that sexual predatory behaviour is real and is harmful to all involved, so please try to accept that this behaviour exists even if it's not been personally experienced. Members can also encourage their meeting at a group conscience to discuss the issue if they perceive that it's not been given due attention.

4. What can NA do about it?

That NA members ratified the establishment of a permanent sub-committee suggests that sexual predatory behaviour is being taken seriously as a problem that needs addressing. See the 'practical things NA can do' section above.

Other Areas in London and UK can follow suit if they chose to and set-up their own sub-committees. NA members and their home group committee are encouraged to promote and raise awareness of appropriate behaviour at NA-organised events.

5. Who is responsible for dealing with the issue?

We all are.

6. I've been a victim of sexual predatory behaviour, what can I do and what can I expect?

Please don't suffer in silence or resentment – talk with your sponsor, a trusted NA fellow or seek professional support as soon as possible.

Processing feelings is essential to help move through the experience safely, as is gauging the most appropriate response for the victim, the home group meeting and NA as a whole.

Depending on the nature of the incident, it can be discussed at a home group business committee meeting or with a committee member and a group conscience held to reach a decision and agree appropriate action.

It is reasonable for someone disclosing an incident to have their voice heard by the home group committee without fear of judgement or reprisal. See 'Role of committee during or after a disclosure' section above.

Concept 10 tells us that any member of a service body can petition that body for the redress of a personal grievance without fear of reprisal. This could be a group, meeting committee, Area or Region.

If a law has been broken, with the right personal support in place, take the matter to the police or relevant authorities – see Q10.

If advice outside of your meeting is needed, then contact the sexual predatory behaviour committee on info.spb@ne.london.ukna.org

It may be that the solution exists outside NA so please use the most effective resources and support available.

7. I've witnessed sexual predatory behaviour, what can I do?

Let's just take a moment here to acknowledge that we could still be dealing with allegations or assumption and not confirmed events – please see 'Summary' and definitions.

Victim perspective

Please don't ignore it. Turning away or not acknowledging a sexual predatory situation only increases the likelihood of it happening again and could challenge the unity of NA as a whole and more people could be harmed.

Personal safety is also a factor, so be mindful of how to get involved and where possible, if the threat is present and immediate, invite support from fellows to help intervene safely.

Witnessing such behaviour in itself can be triggering so please talk with a sponsor or a trusted NA fellow to process the feelings and get support through any next steps.

If a witness is comfortable in their recovery and has the right relationship with the victim, please use some of the suggestions in these guidelines to help find a way forward.

For issues that can be dealt with by the meeting these can be added to a home group meeting's safety statement/preamble as inappropriate behaviour while retaining the victim's anonymity.

If the victim wishes to keep the incident to themselves, please respect their wishes, remembering that their consent is needed to share the information – and breaking this agreement could be re-traumatising and harmful, especially if it evolves into gossip.

Perpetrator perspective

If you've witnessed an incident you may feel a range of emotions towards the perpetrator: anger, resentment, revulsion, injustice, pity or compassion.

As suggested above, witnessing such behaviour can in itself can be triggering so please talk with your sponsor or trusted NA fellow to help process feelings. The other suggestions made above are equally valid here and the wishes of the victim are important no matter what feelings there are towards the perpetrator.

It may be tempting to confront the perpetrator but please be mindful of your own safety and try to find resolution through group conscience.

If there is a good relationship with the perpetrator two people may wish to take them aside and offer them guidance on their behaviour or, where appropriate, suggest help they might need.

In either of the above situations, victim or perpetrator, if the matter is complex and can't be resolved through a group conscience, please contact the sexual predatory behaviour committee on info.spb@ne.london.ukna.org

8. A victim/perpetrator has confided in me and I don't know what to do.

Victim perspective

The important point here is also covered in Q7: if the victim wishes to keep the incident to themselves, please respect their wishes – their consent is needed to share the information. Breaking this agreement could be re-traumatising and harmful, especially if it evolves into gossip.

Be there for the victim with love, guidance and support, while taking care not to carry their burden and using your recovery programme to keep yourself safe.

Perpetrator perspective

If the perpetrator is known to have behaved in a predatory way and the matter is public within the home group meeting or fellowship, then guidance on how they can maintain and work their own recovery programme while facing the consequences of their actions is the way forward; especially looking at their role in the incident and possible amends.

Where a perpetrator is not known to others and the confidant is carrying a secret, encourage them to be honest about their behaviour, willing to make amends, and open-minded about the consequences. As we know, a programme without honesty, willingness and open-mindedness is unlikely to be successful.

In some cases, where the law has been broken and the perpetrator remains silent, the confidant may need to seek a group conscience with home group committee for guidance or take the matter to the police – see Q10 and Q11 regarding anonymity and the law.

9. What about the perpetrators, do they get any support?

For newcomers and those in early recovery who are still learning to understand and regulate their behaviours and who have acted in a predatory way that challenges the safety and recovery of a fellow then compassionate intervention, guidance and support may prevent a recurrence and lead to healthy, appropriate behaviours in the future. The sponsor or two committee/NA members are ideally placed to have the conversation and offer guidance.

For those who repeatedly behave in a predatory way towards fellows or the act is considered serious enough for intervention but not a police matter, the home group meeting / conscience can decide on the best way forward for their meeting. This could mean asking the perpetrator to leave the home group meeting or not to attend future ones in the interests of its unity and safety.

If the perpetrator has broken the law, then the matter can be handled by the police and the consequences faced. See Q10 and Q11 regarding anonymity and compassion.

10. I believe that laws have been broken, can I go to the police?

Those who want to report an incident that happened to someone else should consider the wishes of the victim when making a decision (see Q11).

In principle, if a law has been broken the police can be involved. Try first to make sure that all information and facts are available. If in doubt, raise it with your sponsor, home group meeting committee or sexual predatory behaviour sub-committee. If the behaviour involves an illegal act, then the due process of law will be followed and the police involved.

Anonymity is important to NA but it is not beyond the law and an individual who perpetrates an illegal act should still face the consequences of their actions, while still being supported and dealt with compassionately.

Members who take an incident to the police should be able to do so without fear of reprisals or judgement from fellow members when the action has been taken in the interest of unity, fellowship and the safety of NA as a whole.

11. What about bringing NA into disrepute?

Anonymity is important to NA but we are not beyond the law and we are part of our larger society, so an individual who perpetrates an illegal act can face the consequences of their actions, while still being supported with compassion.

This extract from the Violent and Disruptive Behaviour service leaflet reminds us of the spiritual concept of anonymity.

“While we want to respect each member’s’ anonymity, a violent individual sacrifices his or her right to personal anonymity by their behaviour. Calling law enforcement is appropriate when personal safety is at stake.”

The Violent and Disruptive Behaviour service leaflet is available in full [here](#).

12. What about the newcomer?

The definition of sexual predatory behaviour in Q1 is especially relevant for a newcomer or someone returning from a relapse as they are particularly vulnerable. And it's not unusual in the early days for obsession and compulsion to manifest in other areas, such as romantic and sexual relations. Discerning what healthy behaviour is can be difficult and lead to those in early recovery being more prone to exploitation.

Likewise, a newcomer who doesn't understand healthy boundaries in personal relationships can find themselves in the role of perpetrator. Or someone who witnesses inappropriate behaviour could be frightened and confused, never to come back and discover that recovery works, and that any addict can stop using, lose the desire to use and find a way to live.

All newcomers need love and support to feel welcomed and in a safe place to recover. If in any doubt, take a Tradition 5 / Step 12 moment to reflect on who we were when we first came into the rooms and how it felt.

Following the suggestions in these guidelines will help make NA a safer place for newcomers to find recovery.

13. How can I deal with bad behaviour when it's outside the meeting or fellowship time?

If the problem is between NA members and someone feels under threat or unsafe then NA can provide guidance and support as personal recovery or safety is at risk.

If the behaviour involves an illegal act, then the due process of law is to be followed and the police can be involved. Anonymity is important to NA but it is not beyond the law and an individual who perpetrates an illegal act still faces the consequences of their actions, while still being supported and dealt with compassionately.

Please refer to the other suggestions in these guidelines on how NA can help.

14. How can I role model appropriate behaviour?

Role-modelling the spiritual principles of honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, trust, kindness, tolerance and humility can be a tall order and though we do our best, we aren't perfect.

In Q5 we suggested that everyone is responsible for the problem so it would be useful to reflect on our own behaviour in early recovery that may have unintentionally caused offence to someone else.

These are some useful prompts to consider:

- Am I accepting and understanding of other people's world view?
- Can I take responsibility for my own recovery without blaming or shaming myself or others?
- In NA we talk about looking for the similarities but can I also see and accept the differences?
- Can I recall how safe I felt when I first came to NA and am I doing my part to make other people feel safe?

15. What should I be guiding my sponsees to do?

A good start would be to take them through these guidelines and discuss the definition of sexual predatory behaviour with them.

16. How can I get help?

Here's a simple list of people to talk to.

- Sponsor
- An experienced and sympathetic fellow
- GSR for the meeting
- Home group committee member
- Sexual predatory behaviour sub-committee or one of its members
 - The monthly meeting dedicates 30 minutes each meeting for specific concerns
- Area meeting (it could be a different area there's a local Area conflict)

17. I'm still not sure what to do or I'm worried my voice won't be heard, is there someone who I can talk to?

If the meeting committee route has been explored and the situation remains unresolved or if a member still isn't sure what steps to take, it can be discussed with the sexual predatory behaviour committee.

To contact the sub-committee, email info.spb@ne.london.ukna.org or join our zoom meeting (7pm every third Wednesday of the month) where we dedicate up to 30 minutes of each meeting to questions or concerns from members.

As trusted servants the sub-committee members have undertaken as part of our role to remain impartial and offer support based on these guidelines agreed ultimately by NA members.

If uncomfortable talking about an incident within their own Area, members can contact the committee member of another Area to seek support.

Together we can!

Through trusting in the traditions and applying spiritual principles such as honesty, empathy, courage, accountability, open-mindedness and willingness, together we can face all of our difficulties as they arise.

The problem of sexual predatory behaviour doesn't have to be a fatal one, especially if we work together and take appropriate measures through our group consciences. Spiritual growth is a collective process and our individual recovery depends on it.

"As each member relies on the support of the fellowship for survival, so NA's survival depends on its members."