

World Service Board of Trustees Bulletin #15

Open and Closed NA Meetings

This article was generated by the World Service Board of Trustees in August 1987 in response to the needs of the fellowship. This bulletin was revised during the 1995-1996 conference year.

Our purpose in addressing open and closed NA meetings is to help NA members understand precisely what NA meetings can offer to both addicts and non-addicts. There are different types of NA meetings which serve different purposes. Communication from the fellowship has revealed the need to understand what role the different types play in carrying our message.

The population at large is gaining an increased awareness of our fellowship, and has an increased interest in our meetings. The board of trustees has received reports of confusion arising when interested non-addicts or people who are not sure if they are addicts attend NA meetings. This confusion can be magnified when these individuals participate in our meetings.

Our message of recovery in meetings can be clouded or diluted when people such as parents, spouses, therapists, members of other fellowships, or others who are not NA members share or speak at NA meetings.

We always encourage respect, tact, and diplomacy when confronted with circumstances where non-addicts attend regular NA meetings. Most of these occasions do not present continuing problems for our groups. However, with continued growth and increased awareness about NA, all of us must look ahead. It is our belief that, by gaining clarity about open and closed NA meetings, our members can be prepared to carry the message of recovery from drug addiction to addicts, as well as sharing our message to others who are interested.

The World Service Board of Trustees recommends the following guidelines and definitions:

1. A Narcotics Anonymous meeting, whether it is open or closed, is a refuge for addicts. It is intended to be a safe and beneficial place where an addict can hear about and participate in recovery from the disease of drug addiction. As much as we might like to, we cannot be all things to all people.
2. A closed meeting in Narcotics Anonymous is for those individuals who identify themselves as

addicts or for those who are uncertain and think they might have a drug problem. A closed Narcotics Anonymous meeting provides a freedom that is necessary for more personal and intimate sharing by Narcotics Anonymous members. It does so by providing an atmosphere in which addicts can feel more certain that those attending will be able to identify with them, and share their own experience, strength, and hope.

3. An open meeting is an NA meeting that may be attended by anyone (e.g., judges, probation officers, professionals, family members) interested in how we have found recovery from the disease of addiction. Verbal participation, however, is limited to NA members only. An open meeting in Narcotics Anonymous allows people from outside of the fellowship to observe what Narcotics Anonymous is and how it functions. This can be very helpful to those individuals who are striving to reach a decision regarding their personal status as an addict. An open meeting in Narcotics Anonymous is one method our groups use to achieve their primary purpose of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. Some groups also have open meetings as a way of allowing non-addict friends and relatives of NA members to celebrate recovery anniversaries with them.
4. Our service structure provides an avenue for non-addict participation in Narcotics Anonymous. In addition to recognizing the need for and value of non-addict trustees (*A Guide to World Services in NA*) and non-addict special workers (Tradition Eight), the fellowship has approved material (*A Guide to Public Information*) which provides for public information community meetings. These meetings are the vehicle for service committee efforts which are aimed at communicating information about our fellowship to the general public. These are not regular NA meetings, and they are the preferred approach to informing the general public about Narcotics Anonymous. This approach avoids confusion, presents no threat to anonymity, does not affect the NA message in regular meetings, and allows us to continue our recovery and service while at the same time meeting the needs of non-addicts who are interested in NA.

(Reprinted from The NA Way Magazine, December 1987)