

H&I meetings can carry the NA message of recovery to addicts who do not have full access to regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings. H&I is an important service in our public relations efforts to inform the public and the potential member about our program. When addicts seeking recovery know who we are and where to find our meetings, our efforts have been successful. H&I meetings and presentations, except for those in long-term facilities, are intended to introduce attendees to some of the basics of the NA program.

This resource consists of three sections: *Corrections*, *Treatment*, and *Committees*. The *Corrections* section offers guidance for taking NA meetings into correctional facilities (jails and prisons). The *Treatment* section offers guidance for servants taking NA meetings into treatment centers. The *Committees* section explains the basic structure and function of an H&I committee and provides best practices for service committees looking to start H&I service.



# H&I BASICS

## Corrections

H&I service embodies our primary purpose in Narcotics Anonymous: to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. When addicts seeking recovery know who we are and where to find our meetings, this means our efforts have been successful. H&I meetings and presentations, except for those in long-term facilities, are intended to introduce those attending to some of the basics of the NA program.

For those who are of service to H&I, carrying the message into a correctional facility can instill gratitude and help them stay in touch with the reality of the disease of addiction. It gives members an opportunity to practice the Twelfth Step and Fifth Tradition and deepen their own spiritual growth. This resource outlines the key points to consider when bringing H&I panels into correctional facilities. More extensive information can be found in the *Public Relations Handbook* and through local PR committees.

## SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

### Hope

Jails are a revolving door for many still-suffering addicts who may be at the end of the road and looking for a way out. Sitting with their thoughts, some incarcerated addicts may be in a good position to receive the NA message of recovery.

An H&I panel could be an incarcerated addict's first exposure to NA, or to the hope that they can get and stay clean while incarcerated. Hearing members share may be an incarcerated addict's only connection to the outside.

Although personal experience in the correctional system is not a requirement for H&I service behind the walls, sharing from members who have been incarcerated may offer a special level of identification and hope for addicts inside. Above all, members entering facilities need to follow all the facility's regulations and use clear NA language so that NA's message is not blurred.

### Consistency and Commitment

The principles of consistency and commitment are vitally important when selecting trusted servants to carry the message into correctional facilities. H&I is an important service in NA's public relations efforts. When NA members and service bodies are reliable, it reflects well on the Fellowship. Taking on an H&I commitment, especially in corrections, is a commitment to represent NA at its best. Building relationships of trust and respect with facilities is essential.

Every facility has its own rules and regulations all outsiders must follow. To get clearance to enter the facility, members must often apply with their full legal names and may be required to have a certain amount of time off parole or probation. Fingerprinting and background checks may be conducted. Additionally, a tuberculosis test may be required, which could involve two separate visits to a medical professional to administer the test and to check it several days later. More rarely, some facilities may require volunteers to attend an orientation that may include mandatory training about reporting knowledge of sexual assault or intimidation happening in the prison.

Whatever the rules are in a given institution, it may help to remember that they exist for the safety and security of everyone involved. Personal appearance is very important, including for online meetings. Panel leaders

should inform new panel speakers of the dress code ahead of time. Some facilities are very strict about what can be brought inside and may not even allow literature. A commitment to H&I service is a demonstration of responsibility. Trusted servants realize that responsibility by carrying the message and following facility rules.

## Anonymity

Although anonymity is integral to all NA service, in correctional settings it is essential. Care should be taken to preserve incarcerated addicts' anonymity with the facility, among members, and in the community before and after release. Likewise, trusted servants should avoid sharing phone numbers, social media accounts, or any personal or family information with incarcerated addicts. Some facilities may not grant access to anyone who has had prior contact with someone on the inside, and if a member does encounter someone they knew from active addiction or are related to during their commitment, they should consider recusing themselves for that meeting depending on the guidelines of the facility and their H&I committee. Selfless service keeps the focus on recovery rather than friendships or personalities. At the heart of Step Twelve is a commitment: not just to share NA's message with the still-suffering addict, but to practice the program's principles in all our affairs.

## BUILDING & MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FACILITIES

Bringing H&I services into a facility for the first time can require perseverance. It may be common for facilities to decline initially, especially if the facility personnel are not familiar with or have misconceptions about the NA program. Public relations (PR) committees can be valuable partners in the effort to get a presentation to a decisionmaker at the facility. Having an inside champion, such as a chaplain or volunteer coordinator at the facility, can be useful in gaining administrators' trust and a first step in building a relationship.

Corrections systems can differ significantly from state to state or country to country. However, while the particulars under different governments vary, the same general principles apply. Reach out to the facility warden or those administrators who oversee the wardens with the aim of setting up a meeting where they can talk about how NA helps incarcerated addicts, the purpose of H&I, and the number of H&I meetings within their jurisdiction. Although this may take some persistence, it is often worth the effort, as the relationship with the administrators can be a valuable one to foster and maintain alongside relationships with individual facilities. Once a relationship is established, it is equally important to maintain it. We follow up regularly and ask how we can improve or be of better service.

At the outset, it is important to set clear, realistic expectations about what NA can and cannot do with the number of volunteers available. Likewise, gaining a thorough understanding of the facility's regulations—ideally in writing—to share with incoming volunteers will help to create a successful working relationship. Personal conduct, including dress, can go a long way in fostering mutual respect.

Some types of institutions, such as juvenile or psychiatric correctional facilities, may have especially strict policies about things like physical contact or require more robust orientation for volunteers. Commitments at these kinds of facilities are more challenging than regular H&I panels



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and are best suited to the most experienced trusted servants. When joining a new panel, it is suggested to follow the lead of more experienced members and practice the spiritual principle of listening. Disruptive behavior is not uncommon in these settings. Legally, if a minor shares that they have been abused, the H&I committee may be required to report it. And in psychiatric facilities in particular, it is important not to offer advice or opinions on prescribed medication. Before committing to work with these institutions, committees should assess whether they have enough experienced trusted servants who are up to the task.

## Accountability

Correctional institutions may not be familiar with the principles and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous, so it is critical to present a good public-facing image so that decisionmakers trust our program and our Fellowship. It is up to us to make sure we are meeting the needs of the incarcerated. A point of contact from the service body should check in with the facility on a monthly basis to see what they need, ask if they have any suggestions for how we could improve, and keep contact information up to date. Regular follow-up builds trust and demonstrates reliability. Clear, consistent communication is essential.

If a trusted servant cannot fulfill their commitment a particular week, they communicate that as soon as possible and ideally find another member who has already been cleared to replace them. Sometimes H&I committees may find themselves overcommitted, with too few people to fulfill all their obligations. In such cases, best practice is going to the facility to let them know that H&I is overcommitted and needs to discontinue or decrease the schedule of meetings. NA will retain its credibility and respectability by meeting face-to-face with facility staff when we are unable to keep a commitment. Having a larger pool of trusted servants to call upon helps committees avoid these situations.

## OVERVIEW OF H&I STRUCTURE

H&I panels are not autonomous. They report to H&I committees, which in turn are accountable to a larger service body, usually an area, regional, or zonal service committee, in keeping with our concept of a single point of decision making and accountability. The larger service body also serves as the H&I committee's source of funding for literature and other expenses. As with other NA service commitments, it is important for H&I to work with the service body in the spirit of unity, bringing initiatives and requests to the body and gaining their support. In isolated or developing NA communities where formation of and participation in an area service committee (ASC) with an H&I subcommittee is not yet possible or practical, one or more groups may take on responsibility for H&I efforts. In such cases, the principle of accountability is fundamental to H&I, including an inventory of human and financial resources. Our experience has shown it is better to start small and build from there.

Generally, the most effective setup for H&I service is a local H&I subcommittee associated with an area service committee. In some areas or regions, H&I may be part of the public relations subcommittee, while in others they are two distinct bodies. In either case, it is suggested that H&I and PR work together toward their shared goal of carrying the NA message. Although H&I usually has the responsibility to provide panel meetings, trusted servants from both committees may be involved with presentations in facilities that house potential members.

The format for H&I meetings or presentations can vary depending on the facility. In short-term facilities, each panel may have an assigned leader who brings in speakers on a weekly or monthly basis to share their experience, strength, and hope in recovery. This format focuses on the message that panel members are carrying to the potential members. In contrast, at long-term facilities, panel leaders may want to encourage more participation from incarcerated addicts. Regardless of the format, H&I panel members are there to share about their recovery and refrain from sharing "war stories" of active addiction.

The length of time a member may serve as panel leader is up to the local service body's group conscience. Because the process of getting speakers cleared to enter correctional facilities can be cumbersome, some H&I committees may support longer-term commitments.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS

The pandemic ushered in a dramatic growth in virtual NA service, including H&I. Because online panels can draw from a wider geographic area, they may have the benefit of a deeper pool of volunteers. In addition, virtual meetings can multiply the number of people receiving NA's message. A single virtual panel can reach multiple segregated cell blocks in multiple prisons. This is another reason why collaborating with administrators can be beneficial. In one state, for instance, all the women's prisons dial into a single H&I meeting. This allows an addict who transfers facilities to continue attending the same meeting. Some parts of the world even hold multinational prison panels, with as many as 50 prisons logging in to the same meeting!



As with in-person H&I meetings, building and maintaining strong relationships with facilities is essential when establishing online panels. An initial step could be a meeting with the warden to discuss the feasibility of virtual meetings within the facility. It's possible that additional meetings may follow with IT and security personnel. Sometimes facilities decline because they lack the budget, the staff, or the equipment necessary for virtual H&I. If a request is initially denied, an approach may be to ask the decisionmakers what they would need in order to consider online meetings. Public relations experience helps H&I leaders communicate the concrete benefits of virtual NA to decisionmakers.

## Technology and Equipment

Once approval has been granted, trusted servants work with the facility to get an inventory of equipment they have. A jail may be more likely than a prison to have Wi-Fi, and prison conditions vary widely around the world. Some facilities may require more than one conversation, as well as diplomacy and support, in order to get online connection set up.

Based on experience, minimally the facility will need a laptop, projector, and speakers, or alternatively, a smart TV. Some setups may require a separate microphone as well. If incarcerated addicts are permitted to speak during the meeting, they can come up one at a time to the microphone. If a facility has a preference toward a particular video chat platform, it is important to let them make that decision. It is H&I's responsibility to adapt to the facility's needs, not the other way around.

If no Wi-Fi connection exists at the facility, H&I meetings can take place in a dedicated room where the laptop setup has a wired connection to the internet. If the facility lacks internet access altogether, don't be discouraged—there are still ways to carry the NA message there. Meetings might take place over the telephone, or trusted servants may bring in speaker CDs or DVDs (shared only within the facility and after release forms have been signed). In one institution, where the only medium addicts could listen to was AM radio, the H&I committee rented an hourlong slot through their local radio station to share a message of recovery. There's always a way!

## Security and Authentication

In many cases, online meetings require the same security clearance as in-person ones. Any differences in clearance level or procedure should be noted in writing in case of a personnel change at the facility. Just as they would in person, the facility will need to authenticate that virtual panelists are the same individuals who got cleared. Virtual volunteers can often do this by holding a photo ID up to their face and getting close to the camera.

Use discretion in giving out the meeting ID and password to H&I subcommittee members, and give it only to facility staff who have been cleared. Effective H&I leaders ensure that all trusted servants are kept up to date with any changes to the links or passwords for online meetings.

## HANDLING STAFF CHANGES, CONSISTENCY OF TRUSTED SERVANTS, SECURITY

When trusted servants have been coming to a particular institution for some time, they may develop a comfortable working relationship with the personnel they interact with. Staff turnover within a facility does happen, however, and new staff members might not be familiar with how NA H&I works. While they may have received some basic information about NA's ongoing service to their facility, they may have expectations or misconceptions that clash with a volunteer's sense of "how things are done."

Trusted servants need to pay attention when faced with new correctional staff who may not do things exactly like the previous staff did. Instead of getting upset or giving pushback, be willing to inform the staff about NA and the meeting to help them gain an understanding. It may be worthwhile for trusted servants to consider providing a presentation to the new staff to help them get a better sense of NA H&I. Patience, flexibility, and humility are all valuable when working out any type of personnel change. With these, a trusting relationship with the facility can be maintained and the addicts on the inside can experience consistent delivery of the NA message.

One way to minimize issues when staff turnover happens is to be in constant communication with the facility. If the facility can notify the committee leaders of any changes in advance, volunteers going in can be informed and prepared to meet new staff and begin building relationships. In these cases, it may be helpful to arrive early to allow extra time to get through their process.

As stated earlier, consistency is key in maintaining good relations with correctional facilities, especially during transitions. H&I committees that cultivate consistency in their trusted servants will have more success in fulfilling NA's primary purpose.

## MEETING AT THE GATE / REENTRY

When reentering society after incarceration, it can be daunting and challenging to find one's first NA meeting on the outside. This can stir up feelings of uncertainty or fear. To support addicts through this transition, some H&I committees have established programs pairing addicts with trusted servants who act as temporary contacts, accompanying the newly released to their first outside NA meetings.

NA communities have had success with different arrangements for meeting addicts upon release. In some places, the process begins with the incarcerated addict filling out a short form as their release date approaches. They may then receive a packet including a meeting schedule for their local area and some relevant informational pamphlets. In some NA communities, volunteers meet addicts at the prison gates when they get out and take them directly to a meeting, while in other places volunteers arrange to meet the addicts at a meeting within a day or two of their release. Alternatively, H&I committees may use a more informal process of contacting the reentry managers at institutions and sending them meeting schedules for addicts upon release.



Temporary NA contacts usually do not sponsor the newly released addicts they are helping. Instead, they introduce the formerly incarcerated member to as many other NA members as they can to help them build a supportive NA network. As with any other new member, feeling connected to members in the rooms can make all the difference between staying clean and going back out.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Remember to:

- Make directories of both virtual and in-person meetings and NA helpline numbers available to potential members so they can find NA upon release.
- Start and end on time!
- Clearly state that Narcotics Anonymous is separate from the facility and from other fellowships and treatment methods.
- Obey the dress code and use common sense.
- Conduct orientation and/or training sessions for all members involved in H&I service.
- Meet with facility staff on a regular basis to check on how NA is doing in the facility and how we could improve.
- Ensure that all panel members carry a clear NA message of recovery.
- Clarify the rules with whomever you bring into the facility.
- Emphasize that NA recovery is available to all addicts, regardless of drug(s) used.
- Involve potential members in the meetings, especially in long-term facilities (NA meeting readings, etc.).
- Screen all panel members, speakers, and chairperson(s).
- Attempt to get all agreements with correctional staff in writing and record them with the H&I committee.
- Adhere to the security regulations at all times.
- Avoid visible associations with outside issues or organizations through clothing, jewelry, or tattoos.
- Let incarcerated addicts know about *Reaching Out*.
- Let incarcerated addicts know about sponsorship behind the walls and provide contact information so they can get connected with a sponsor.

### Refrain from:

- Conducting an H&I meeting or presentation alone.
- Giving any inmate within the facility your address or telephone number.
- Breaking another person's anonymity.
- Getting involved in discussions on outside issues; don't forget why we are there.
- Showing favoritism to any resident(s).
- Bringing an NA member who has friends and/or family in the facility.
- Accepting money or gifts from, or giving money or gifts to, any incarcerated addict.
- Emphasizing using days while sharing an NA message of recovery.
- Using excessive profanity.
- Debate any issues involving facility rules, regulations, programs, or other fellowships.
- Discussing conditions within the facility or facility staff members with incarcerated addicts.
- Dressing inappropriately, wearing flashy jewelry, or carrying excessive cash.
- Taking messages or carrying letters into or out of the facility.
- Asking what type of crime an incarcerated addict has been convicted of or discussing guilt or innocence.

## MOVING FORWARD

Addicts on the inside can benefit from NA's message of hope and promise of freedom from addiction. Bringing NA to correctional facilities, whether in person or virtually, offers a potentially lifesaving pathway for recovery from addiction.

Once addicts hear the message, read the literature, and regain a glimmer of hope, they may want to start working Steps with a sponsor. In some local service communities, there is an established committee dedicated to sponsoring incarcerated addicts, sometimes referred to as Sponsorship Behind the Walls. In other places, this service is a subcommittee of H&I or public relations. Regardless of how the specific service structure is organized, sponsoring incarcerated addicts through letter writing is a powerful way for both sponsors and sponsees to stay connected to the program and engaged in their recovery. Before starting a new committee of this kind, it can be helpful to reach out to other local committees or look at the Local Service Resources page at [na.org](http://na.org) and take note of how other committees do things. Rather than reinventing the wheel, service bodies can learn from one another.

## SPONSORSHIP BEHIND THE WALLS (SBTW)

Introducing newcomers to sponsorship while they are in an institution can also introduce them to spiritual principles like friendship, accountability, and hope. For the first time in a long while, they might feel they are truly not alone. For some addicts, letters from a sponsor might be their only regular contact with the outside world—maybe even the only demonstration that someone actually cares. Having a sponsor can be the beginning of a caring, supportive relationship.

Sponsoring an incarcerated addict can also reinforce the sponsor's own recovery through connection and purpose. Commitment is important when sponsoring people who are incarcerated. Unlike most NA service positions, which have a scheduled rotation, sponsorship behind the walls is a long-term undertaking that can require years of dedication from the sponsor. In this respect, it is like any other sponsor-sponsee relationship in the NA Fellowship.

### Working the Steps

There is no single correct way to work the Twelve Steps in Narcotics Anonymous, but for consistency's sake it can be useful for local subcommittees to agree on a common method, such as the *Step Working Guides*. That way, if a sponsor does need to give up their commitment, the addict's new sponsor will be able to pick up right where their previous sponsor left off. Maintaining a consistent program of stepwork is as important for the incarcerated member as it is for any other addict.

Some SBTW committees will initially ask incarcerated members to read designated IPs and/or answer some questions before diving into stepwork. This may help SBTW assess whether the addict is genuine in their desire to work Steps. Once a sponsee begins their stepwork, it is helpful to lay out clear and simple expectations at the beginning of the process. For example, a sponsor might ask their sponsee not to move on to Step Two until they've gone over Step One. In writing to sponsees, keep NA's Traditions and spiritual principles at the forefront.

Effective committee leadership includes regular follow-up to make sure everything is going well for sponsees on the inside. Incarcerated addicts should be made aware of the process for requesting a different sponsor, whether through a facility coordinator or by writing directly to the service committee. The more consistent the communication between committees and facilities, the better the sponsor-sponsee relationships will be.



## Mailing Logistics

Understanding an institution's mail policies is an important first step in establishing a SBTW program. Depending on the facility, sponsors may be able to mail NA literature to their sponsees directly, just as they mail their letters. Some facilities will only allow books inside if they have been shipped directly from the publisher. In these cases, committees can order literature online and have it shipped from the World Service Office to the facility.

Sometimes incarcerated people can get moved around within or between institutions, so it is helpful for SBTW committees to communicate regularly with prisons to ensure that all sponsees' addresses are current and complete. Incarcerated members usually address their letters to a PO box associated with their sponsor's local service body. Sponsors should also use this PO box as their return address and refrain from using their personal physical address on any mail.

Not all SBTW committees rely on the mail. In some areas, incarcerated addicts communicate with their sponsors and do stepwork via electronic tablets. As with H&I service, technology is increasingly expanding the possibilities of carrying the NA message.

## One Addict Helping Another

Incarcerated addicts are no different from their fellow NA members living life on the outside. The heart of NA recovery is one addict helping another, whether it be at an NA meeting, on an institutional panel, or through sponsorship behind the walls. Incarceration may be a dark time for addicts, but NA can be the difference that changes the course of an incarcerated addict's life.



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PR Handbook: [na.org/handbooks](http://na.org/handbooks)

Reaching Out: [na.org/reachingout](http://na.org/reachingout)

Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides: [na.org/webstore](http://na.org/webstore)

IP #23, *Staying Clean on the Outside*: [na.org/englit](http://na.org/englit) or [na.org/webstore](http://na.org/webstore)