

## **DOCUMENT 2: MEETING ESSENTIALS**

The purpose of FA meetings is twofold: to help members get and stay abstinent and to carry the message of hope to newcomers. The following suggestions have helped many food addicts find recovery and have supported the ongoing abstinence of thousands of FA members. Groups are encouraged to discuss this material at business meetings.

In accordance with the 2011 [World Service Conference vote](#), FA meetings are by definition in-person.

### **CHOOSING MEETING LOCATION AND TIME**

**Length of Time.** As noted in "[Document 1](#): Meeting Requirements, Standards, Registration and Changes," all FA meetings must last 90 minutes. Instead of ending a meeting early, members may share again or read from a short piece of FA literature, such as *connection* magazine.

**Time of Day.** Meetings are meant to support recovery and should not be scheduled at times that conflict with meals, sponsee calls, quiet time, or sleep.

**Facility.** All members are best served when meetings are held in places that are religiously neutral, such as hospitals, libraries, and community centers. If a religious space is the only option, members try to use parish halls, Sunday school rooms, or any place other than the sanctuary or worship hall for meetings. A meeting's leader should never sit by an altar or speak from a pulpit, bimah, or any other location identified with a religious celebrant.

**Accessibility.** Many FA members or newcomers use wheelchairs, walkers, or may have physical difficulties related to weight. Meetings best maintain accessibility when they find meeting rooms and places that are a short walk from the parking lot or main entrance, avoiding rooms with steep stairs, tight aisles, or chairs with narrow seats and arms.

### **SETTING UP**

**Chairs.** To encourage members to focus their attention on the speaker rather than themselves or the group, FA meetings are required to set up chairs in rows, facing the speaker.

**Literature.** Literature should be neatly displayed on a table or other surface ten minutes before the meeting begins. Only Conference-approved and board-approved literature (*Twenty-Four Hours A Day*, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *The Little Red Book*, *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *connection* magazine, *Gratitude in Action* newsletter, and [all FA pamphlets and books](#)) belong on the literature table along with meeting directories, phone lists, and communications from World Service, intergroups, and chapters.

**Signs.** Most groups use laminated signs to direct newcomers from the parking lot to the meeting room. Some have found that lawn signs are helpful. To protect anonymity, signs should be labeled "FA Meeting" instead of "Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous Meeting."

## SHARING

**Overcoming Isolation.** FA members stand in front of the room to read, share, or qualify, even if the groups are small. Prior to speaking, members say their names and identify themselves as food addicts, facing the group rather than turning toward or addressing the meeting leader.

**Neutrality.** To keep the message of recovery clearly universal, members avoid the use of specific religious terms or references when sharing. FA is focused on recovery from food addiction through a spiritual program that has no opinion regarding any religion. For the same reason, members avoid sharing on political topics. It is best to avoid references to inside jokes and personal experiences shared with other fellows. While it is tempting to talk about self-help materials or individuals who inspire us, it's always best to keep the focus on our own experience.

**Focus on Addiction.** The Fifth Tradition emphasizes that the purpose of every FA meeting is to share the message of recovery with newcomers. Only members with 90 days or more of continuous abstinence in FA who are working with an FA sponsor are invited to share their experience, strength, and hope. Members talk about their experience in food addiction, describe what happened when they joined FA, and share about what their lives are like now. This kind of sharing is vital for newcomers who need to know that they are not alone, and reminds existing members where they come from. Extensive sharing about problems at work, family issues, and other personal matters are best left to phone calls and private conversations.

**Avoiding Crosstalk.** Crosstalk means interrupting, referring to, commenting on, or using the content of what another person has said during their share at a meeting. This practice can make the original speaker feel judged or misunderstood, especially if something they shared has been taken out of its intended context. Even well-meaning praise can feel like unsolicited advice, opinion, or commentary. Members are encouraged to stick to "I" statements and avoid using "you." A better time to personally relate to a member's share is a one-to-one conversation during the break, after the meeting, or on a phone call. Avoiding comments directed to an individual keeps us in the moment and allows us to share authentically. In that spirit, leaders refrain from ad-libbing when reading the format and members avoid making comments from their seats.

## BEST PRACTICES

**Reaching Out to Newcomers and Returning Members.** Approaching newcomers is the responsibility of all members, not just the designated greeters. Newcomers come first, so instead of visiting with a friend during the break, members are encouraged to help newcomers find a sponsor and exchange phone numbers. A special effort should be taken to welcome those who are returning to the program.

**Being Present.** Since even vibrations can be distracting, members place cell phones on airplane mode during meetings. Recovering food addicts have busy lives and it's not unusual for members to get sleepy at meetings. Out of respect for others, members are encouraged to stand in the back of the room when they feel themselves dozing off.

**Group Conscience.** Group conscience is the collective opinion of a meeting's members, usually as the result of a vote at business meetings, and ideally with substantial unanimity. Some examples of decisions that can be made by group conscience include requesting extra donations to cover meeting expenses, suggesting that first-timers not donate to the Seventh Tradition, or asking members to remain silent during The Promises instead of saying, "We think not" with the reader.

**Small Meetings.** Even when meetings are small, members are encouraged to read just one tool at a time from the front of the room. Small meetings can make use of a variety of [FA meeting format options](#).

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

**Meeting Format.** To assist members with impaired vision, an FA meeting format may be printed in large font. A meeting may also order a Braille format from the FA office.

**Hearing Impairment.** Sound equipment is encouraged in large rooms or when a member has difficulty hearing. Often, groups can use the equipment at their facility. Otherwise, a simple karaoke machine works well. Front-row seats may be reserved for Deaf/hard-of-hearing members. Interpreters must abide by a strict code of confidentiality, so members need not be concerned about anonymity. During a literature meeting, some groups may decide to read the selected material from the front of the room (instead of from seats) so everyone can hear.

**Service Animals.** FA meetings are meant for all who want to stop eating addictively. Groups will accommodate service animals for people with disabilities. However, members are asked not to bring companion/therapy animals or pets into meetings.

**Medical Needs.** The group is encouraged to make an effort at the monthly business meeting to accommodate the needs of members with medical issues such as chemical sensitivities. A statement addressing the issue could be added to the list of meeting disciplines.

## **FOR ADDITIONAL HELP**

MESA (the Meeting Effectiveness, Support, and Assistance subcommittee of the World Service Twelfth Step Committee) is available for any questions or concerns. MESA can be reached at [mesa@foodaddicts.org](mailto:mesa@foodaddicts.org).

In rare instances, groups need to address behavior or comments that are disruptive to the meeting. Guidance can be found [here](#) and members can contact MESA for additional support.