

DOCUMENT 2: MEETING ESSENTIALS

Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA) is a Twelve-Step fellowship for men and women suffering from the disease of food addiction. We are united by our common experience of addiction and our commitment to FA as our common solution. At meetings, we share our understanding that addiction is incurable, that FA is a spiritual program of one-day-at-a-time recovery, and that we must make recovery our top priority. By going to meetings and participating fully in them, we carry the message of hope to newcomers. We also protect and strengthen our own abstinence.

FA meetings are by definition in-person meetings. In accordance with the World Service Conference vote in 2011, no online or phone meetings may register as FA meetings. Meeting with other addicts in person is essential for food addicts because of our tendency to isolate and to be in denial about our disease.

We hope that the suggestions below will be helpful if you are starting a new meeting or if, as an established meeting, you want to step back and think about the health of your meeting. We encourage each group to consider discussing this material at business meetings periodically. The practices we describe reflect the practical experiences of early members who discovered what worked best for food addicts. These practices have withstood the test of time. They have helped many a newcomer into recovery and have supported the ongoing abstinence of thousands of FA members.

MEETING PRACTICES SUPPORTING OUR RECOVERY

As we consider that the primary purpose of our meetings is to “carry the message of recovery to those who still suffer,” we examine how we set up our meetings to best accomplish this. Meetings are our medicine, and they are one of the ways we carry the message.

Setting Up

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 straight rows, facing the speaker.

Sharing

FA members stand in front of the room to read, share, or qualify, even if the meetings are small, in order to overcome our tendency to isolate. Only members with 90 days or more of continuous FA abstinence are eligible to share their experience, strength, and hope.

Prior to sharing, members say their names and identify themselves as food addicts. We face the group rather than directing our words or our body language toward the meeting leader or prior members who have shared.

Many FA members have reached out to the World Service Board to request assistance pertaining to sharing and side remarks that occur at their meetings. Examples of these concerns include members commenting from their seats, fellows ad-libbing lines into the format, and “crosstalk” in response to a member’s sharing.

Although we have not found an “official” AA definition of “crosstalk” and have not developed a definition for FA, this term, in Twelve-Step forums, has commonly come to mean interrupting, referring to, commenting on, or using the content of what another person has said during one’s share at a meeting. We have seen that this practice can negatively affect the originator of the statement. When sharing in this manner, our best intentions have sometimes caused another to feel judged, misunderstood or that something they shared has been taken out of its originally intended context. Even something as well-meaning as praise can feel like unsolicited advice, opinion or commentary.

For the benefit of both speakers and newcomers, it is recommended that we be respectful and conscientious about how we share at meetings, remembering to keep the focus of our sharing on our own experiences.

While we value the concept of identifying with a member who has qualified or shared, a better time to personally relate to that person may be during a one-to-one conversation during the break, after the meeting, or on a phone call. Avoiding this direct commenting or conversation from the front of the room keeps us in the moment and allows us to share something with newcomers that is authentically our own.

When sharing we have found that it is best to avoid references to “inside” jokes or historical experiences with one another. Making such references can cause newer fellows to feel like outsiders as opposed to feeling welcome within the FA fellowship.

Some members are able to speak to a general idea or theme that a speaker discussed, while still sticking to their own story. Some members suggest that the only appropriate thing to say to a member who has qualified is, “Thank you for sharing.”

It is believed that if sharing is limited to our own experience, strength and hope and directed to still-suffering food addicts (keeping to “I” rather than “we” or “you” in our remarks), we will enrich our sharing and our meetings, and “crosstalk” is less likely to occur.

Focusing on Addiction

The Fifth Tradition emphasizes that the purpose of every FA meeting is to share the message of recovery with newcomers. Members talk about what food addiction has done to them, 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. They find comfort and a new understanding when hearing the perspective of recovering members on the disease of food addiction. This kind of sharing also helps our own recovery. As food addicts, we need constant reminders of who we are.

Reaching Out to Newcomers

The meeting formats were developed with the needs of newcomers in mind. FA meetings are required to hold a break at approximately the midpoint, so that members have a chance to greet newcomers or approach people who are sitting alone. Having the sponsor announcement right before the break gives the newcomer an opportunity to reach out for help during the break. Approaching newcomers is the responsibility of all members, not just the designated greeters. This is a good time to offer phone numbers and to ask for the phone numbers of others.

Scheduling

Length of Time. As noted in “Document 1: Meeting Requirements, Standards, Registration and Changes,” all FA meetings must last 90 minutes. This allows ample time for a qualification (live or recorded), and/or for open sharing from a range of members, as well as for a break during which greeters, sponsors, and other meeting members can reach out to newcomers.

Time of Day. Meetings are scheduled at times that support recovery, avoiding times that conflict with meals, sponsee calls, or sleep. Early-morning meetings tend to interfere with calls between sponsees and sponsors, and meetings at noon or late at night make interactions between members and newcomers less likely, as people are likely to need to hurry off to work or to bed.

OUR COMMON WELFARE

FA’s First Tradition reminds us that “our common welfare should come first” and that we must continue to carry the message to *all* food addicts who still suffer (Twelfth Tradition). There are many ways to make FA meetings comfortable and welcoming to all.

Religious Neutrality

Meeting Spaces. FA members or newcomers may be members of any of the world’s religious traditions, or they may have chosen not to affiliate with any religion. 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. (If a meeting’s leader were to sit by an altar or speak from a pulpit, bimah, or any other location identified with a religious celebrant, it could appear disrespectful and make those who are not affiliated with the religious tradition practiced in that space uncomfortable.)

Sharing. FA is focused on recovery from food addiction through a spiritual program that has no opinion regarding any religion. To keep the message of recovery clearly universal, members avoid the use of narrowly religious terms or references when sharing at FA meetings.

Accessibility

Meeting Spaces. 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 meeting places that are a short walk from the parking lot or main entrance, avoiding rooms with steep stairs, narrow aisles, or chairs with narrow seats and arms.

Meeting Format. When needed, an FA meeting format may be printed in large font (no less than 14 point), making it accessible to those with impaired vision. If a Braille format is required, a meeting may order one from the FA office.

Sound Equipment. When members have difficulty hearing what is going on in the meeting due to the size of the room, the acoustics, or other reasons, sound equipment may be used. Meetings may be able to borrow sound equipment from their meeting facility or may need to purchase their own. Front-row seats may be reserved for those who find it difficult to hear. A deaf/hard-of-hearing member should be asked what is needed so that meeting members can work together to meet the need.

Interpreters or Service Animals. If a deaf/hard-of-hearing member takes an interpreter to a meeting, other members in the meeting need not be concerned about anonymity: interpreters must abide by a strict code of confidentiality. FA meetings are meant for all who want to stop eating addictively. We will accommodate service dogs for people with disabilities. However, we ask that members not bring companion animals or pets into meetings.

Medical Needs. Some of our members have medical issues - such as allergies- that make attending meetings a challenge. If a member takes his or her needs to the meeting secretary, then the secretary is required to take the issue to the business meeting. The group is encouraged to make an effort to accommodate the member's needs when possible. If appropriate, a statement addressing the issue could be added to the list of meeting disciplines in the meeting format.

For Additional Help

A meeting seeking help regarding the issue of accessibility or responding effectively to a member with specific needs may contact the MESA (Meeting Effectiveness, Safety and Accessibility) subcommittee of the World Service Twelfth Step Committee via email at mesa@foodaddicts.org.