

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous Meetings, Groups, Home Groups—What Are They?

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The literature of ABA refers at times to gatherings of our members as “Meetings” or “Groups,” and at times uses the term “Home Group.” These three terms are not interchangeable, yet many ABA members are confused about how to distinguish among them. This document will define the concepts and explain the key features that make each of them different from the others.

At this time of great change in ABA, as the Fellowship itself is moving to assume responsibility for our world service structure, clarification of these terms is of immense importance. In order for ABA Groups to exercise their service mission via their General Service Representative (GSR), it would be useful for all ABA members to have a basic understanding of the difference between a “Meeting” and a “Group” and to declare themselves to be members of a particular “Home Group.”

1. The ABA “Meeting”

All gatherings of ABA members begin their existence as Meetings. Generally they are started when one or two sober members see the need for a regular meeting in a particular location, commit themselves to starting one, and proceed to do so. Usually one member contacts the office of the General Service Association (GSA) in Edmonton, Canada, and requests a “starter kit” containing detailed suggestions about how to start a Meeting. After reviewing this material, they decide on a place and time, invite others to come, and the Meeting begins.

Some key characteristics of the ABA Meeting are:

- It generally uses the “Preamble for Meetings” contained in the ABA textbook (pp 142-148) as its basic format.
- It is always guided by the 12 Traditions of ABA.
- If the meeting is “closed,” it welcomes anyone who has a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices (Tradition 3).
- If it is “open,” anyone who is interested in attending is welcome.
- It is unaffiliated with any other organization or enterprise (Tradition 6), even if it meeting in a space provided by another organization.
- It is fully self-supporting (Tradition 7), and this includes paying a reasonable rent to any organization that owns the meeting space.
- The members founding and leading a Meeting serve but never govern it (Tradition 2).
- All members attending the Meeting make decisions about matters affecting it e.g. changing the time, moving to a different location, whether to have coffee available or not, what to do with any money collected that exceeds the Meeting’s expenses. The ABA members who attend the Meeting, either regularly or occasionally, make such decisions by “group conscience” (usually a brief, focused discussion and vote at the end of a meeting), and everyone

trusts that this represents the voice of “a loving God” who is the true authority running the Meeting (Tradition 2).

In contrast to a Group, a Meeting has no list of members, no formal service structure, and no GSR to represent its group conscience at the worldwide level of the ABA Fellowship.

In general, a Meeting is the means by which ABA is first brought into a particular area. If it succeeds in attracting members, and if enough of these members continue to regularly participate in it, a Meeting usually transforms into a Group. This transformation process, which may take a considerable period of time to occur, includes the following steps:

1. The Meeting is well-established and has been stable (i.e. occurring regularly without interruption for at least 3 months).
2. The Meeting may then register itself with the GSA and, if it chooses to do so, be listed on the ABA website.
3. Once the Meeting registers with the GSA, a large packet of materials is mailed to the Contact Person to assist with the further development required to become a Group and function as one.
4. Once the Meeting has been stable and ongoing for **at least 6 months**, its regular members may decide to change it into a Group (See Section 2 below). Some Meetings do not make this shift: either they choose to remain as Meetings or they close before reaching the stage of maturity required to become a Group.

Occasionally a Meeting is initiated by an established Group to fulfil a specific need in the community. This will also be discussed in Section 2.

2. The ABA “Group”

Once two or more ABA members have been participating consistently in a Meeting for a lengthy period (6 months or more), they may decide to become an ABA Group. The primary purpose of the ABA Group is to serve, i.e. to carry the message to the anorexic or bulimic who still suffers (Tradition 5). Two key aspects that change a Meeting into a Group are the development of a formal service structure and the establishment of regular business meetings of the Group.

2.1 Developing a service structure involves the creation of formal service positions that will be filled by Group members. Typical service positions and their duties are:

- Secretary—keeps a record of names and phone numbers of members who wish to belong to the Group, thus making it their “Home Group.” (Some Groups may decide to also list members who have a different Home Group, but who wish to share their phone numbers with newcomers.) The Secretary may also keep minutes at business meetings. If the Group does not yet have a GSR, the Secretary may function as the Contact Person who maintains two-

way communication with the GSA, receiving bulletins from the GSA Office and keeping it updated about all changes in Group information as they occur.

- Treasurer—collects all monetary contributions, pays all Group expenses, and keeps accurate financial records.
- Chairperson—in addition to chairing meetings, this position may involve arriving early to open up and set up the meeting space.
- Greeter—welcomes people at the door.
- Literature Coordinator—may involve ensuring that photocopies of the “Preamble for Meetings” are available for meetings and that sufficient books and pamphlets are available for purchase.
- Milestone Coordinator—ensures tokens are available for monthly sobriety milestones. May also be responsible for ordering medallions when anniversaries of sobriety are approaching, and for purchasing cards and birthday cakes.
- General Service Representative (GSR)—this position is critically important, not only to connecting the Group with the unified whole of ABA, but to the very survival and health of the entire worldwide ABA Fellowship. The GSR is the voice of the Group at the worldwide level and walks a two-way street between the Group and the “GSR Committee” (a committee of all elected GSRs from around the world). One direction involves bringing to the Group all matters identified by the GSR Committee as ones affecting the entire ABA Fellowship. The other direction involves communicating the collective Group conscience on these matters back to the GSR Committee, and thereby to the General Service Association. This truly allows God, as expressed through the group conscience, to steer the ship of ABA in its collective journey of recovery and service (Tradition 2).

The GSR’s role includes participating in regularly scheduled meetings of the GSR Committee, usually by teleconference or videoconference. It also includes promptly informing the GSA of all changes in Group information, e.g. membership numbers, meeting time and location, name and contact information of the current GSR, etc. The GSR passes on to the Group, at its business meetings, all information received from the GSA (bulletins, memos, new documents, and other literature) and from the GSR Committee meetings.

The election of a GSR is an important matter because of the vital role of the GSR at the worldwide level. This election is one area where it is particularly necessary to place “principles before personalities” (Tradition 12) in choosing the Group’s most qualified member. The candidate selected needs a length of sobriety sufficient to allow clear thinking and good judgment, usually at least one year. She or he needs to be an active participant in the Group—someone who consistently “shows up” and desires to be of service—and someone who has knowledge of and commitment to the principles and unique program of ABA. Good listening and communication skills are obviously important, as is a solid and in-depth understanding of service for the common good. The GSR will usually fill the position for one or two consecutive years.

- Alternate GSR—a member elected to substitute for the GSR if he or she is temporarily unavailable to fulfil the duties of the position. The Alternate GSR will meet the same selection criteria used for the GSR.

The above represents only some of the service positions that a Group may decide to create. Some of the positions (e.g. Treasurer, GSR, Alternate GSR) will have sobriety requirements, as suggested by the GSA and/or as decided by the Group itself. If the Group is small, some of these positions may be combined into one. A healthy Group will rotate its members through these positions after varying periods of time, in order to give everyone an opportunity to participate in service work—our most powerful tool of recovery. Rotation of service also ensures that no member begins to dominate the Group and thereby violate Tradition 2.

2.2 A Group also begins holding regular business meetings, perhaps every month or two. At these meetings all matters relating to Group operation are discussed and voted upon. It is at the business meeting that the group really comes to life (Tradition 2), allowing a loving God to be the true director of the Group. A Group is autonomous and can make its own decisions in all matters pertaining to its own operation (Tradition 4), as long as another Group or ABA as a whole is not affected by such decisions. The GSR reports to the business meetings, as discussed earlier. Voting at business meetings is usually limited to members who have declared the Group to be their Home Group, particularly in matters affecting ABA as a whole. This prevents any one member from voting more than once on an issue affecting the worldwide level of ABA (See Section 3 for further discussion.)

It is in the setting of the Group that ABA members learn about the operation of the group conscience. They learn to participate, to take their place and have a voice, yet without dominating others. In this way, the Group supports its members to grow in humility.

Furthermore, a Group is the basic unit of the world service structure of the ABA Fellowship. Through its GSR, the Group expresses its collective voice in all matters relating to the worldwide Fellowship of ABA. Along with all other Groups represented at the GSR Committee, it serves to direct the activities of ABA's "trusted servant," the General Service Association of ABA. In becoming a Group, a collection of ABA members is pledging itself to assume the sacred responsibility of doing its part to ensure the unity and vitality of the entire Fellowship.

In support of its primary purpose, sometimes a Group may decide to initiate a secondary Meeting in addition to its regular one. For example, some members of the "Downtown Noon Group" see a need for another meeting in town that would reach potential members who live far away or who cannot attend a noon meeting. They approach a business meeting of their Group and express their willingness to open another meeting and show up for it regularly. The Group agrees, and the "Outskirts Evening Meeting" begins. It functions under the wings of the main Group: it does not have a separate service structure, and the Group may even

decide to subsidize the rent of the new meeting space until attendance rises enough to cover it. The Meeting does not keep a list of members who attend, nor would anyone consider it their Home Group (explained in Section 3). After 3 months of functioning regularly, however, the Downtown Noon Group Secretary may register the new Meeting with the GSA and have it posted on the ABA website. The Outskirts Evening Meeting does not hold business meetings or elect a separate GSR. In time, if the new Meeting becomes popular and is thriving, the members who attend it may decide to become an autonomous Group and name it as their Home Group. The “Outskirts Evening Group” now forms its own service structure, informs the GSA of its separate existence, and begins to operate independently of the first Group in town.

Another example: the “Sunday Night Phone Meeting Group” sees a need for another phone meeting on Mondays. Two Group members agree to organize and show up for it, and the “Monday Noon Phone Meeting” begins. It is not a separate Group yet, and may never become one. No separate service structure is formed, and Home Group designation remains with the Sunday Group.

3. The ABA “Home Group”

This term simply refers to the decision individual ABA members make about which Group to commit ourselves to, where we will keep showing up regularly. The Home Group is the place where each of us chooses to belong in a special way. After joining the Group, our first name will be added to its membership list, and we would then be counted as an ABA member when any worldwide census is taken of all Groups. (Members’ names, of course, would never be revealed in such a census, in keeping with Tradition 12.) It is at the Home Group that we celebrate our sobriety milestones and anniversaries of sobriety.

After joining a Home Group, we ABA members begin to participate in service within the Group, volunteering for a service position or accepting election to one. This gives us an opportunity to show up, to be responsible, to seek help from others, to make mistakes and clean them up, to learn division of labor, to work together with others—all of which are important life skills many of us didn’t learn when we were practicing anorexic and bulimics. Taking part in the activities of the Home Group allows us to feel “part of”—a wonderful means of healing for people so wounded we have never felt we belonged anywhere. Because we are committed to attending every week, Home Group members become known by others and get to know them in a deeper way than at other Meetings or Groups we attend. Learning to embrace this intimacy rather than run from it is an essential aspect of authentic recovery from any addiction. The Home Group thereby affords each of its members a safe place in which to grow as human beings. For some, it may be the first healthy family we have ever known.

Commitment to a Home Group allows its members to become accountable in our recovery because others notice when we are there and when we are not. Knowing that others depend on us to show up may at times be the only thing that averts a relapse. In this way, our Higher Power uses the Home Group as a special channel

of grace. Furthermore, reaching out for help to a fellow Home Group member is often easier than calling a member we know only casually from a different meeting.

Taking part in business meetings of the Home Group is a basic responsibility of ABA membership. Here we learn to pay attention to the issues discussed, to consider them carefully, to voice our own ideas, to listen respectfully to others, to be patient with the group decision-making process, to trust in the Higher Power who guides it. Hearing the GSR report on matters being discussed at the world service level allows us to broaden our vision of ABA as a whole and to feel connected with members recovering all over the world. It can give us a deep sense of being part of a great Fellowship that a loving God is forming and sustaining to allow the recovery of anorexics and bulimics everywhere. This experience often deepens our personal commitment to recovery and inspires us to step forward in service.

When an issue arises at the world service level that requires the guidance of the group conscience of ABA as a whole, the matter will be brought by the GSR to a business meeting of their Group for discussion and decision. Here is where Home Group membership becomes essential, because normally only Home Group members will be permitted to vote on such issues. This mechanism ensures that every ABA member casts only one vote on matters affecting ABA as a whole. “One member, one vote” is a tried and true slogan developed in the world service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous, one we wish to adopt in ABA, since it ensures the equality of all members. No member is entitled to cast more than one vote on an issue affecting ABA as a whole, because to do so would imply that she regards herself as more important than other members—a violation of Tradition 2.

In conclusion, we hope that this discussion of the differences among the terms, “Meetings,” “Groups,” and “Home Groups” will prove helpful to all ABA members. We hope that many more members will decide to find a Group they wish to name as their Home Group, then join it and start participating in its service structure. We know that doing so cannot fail to strengthen everyone’s recovery.