

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous

Guidelines for Attending ABA Virtual Meetings

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1. Welcome

If you are new to ABA, welcome! We want you to know you are not alone anymore.

We are a group of people who are recovering and have recovered from anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders by following the 12-Step Program originated by Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935 and adapted by ABA in 1993. Before coming to ABA, many of us felt hopeless and lost in the face of an illness so severe that no one had been able to help us. Others among us thought our eating problem was so trivial that it barely deserved to be called a problem. Yet, no matter what our thoughts and feelings, we were able to find recovery and a new freedom through the ABA Program. Although it required commitment and hard work, the results were beyond our wildest imagining: a life truly free from the obsessive prison of anorexia and bulimia.

This document is intended to help people begin to use the ABA virtual meetings. ABA literature, including the ABA textbook, *Anorexics & Bulimics Anonymous: The Fellowship Details its Program of Recovery for Anorexia and Bulimia*, and retreat speaker recordings are available for purchase through the GSA office at www.aba12steps.org. Many helpful documents, such as “12 FAQs for Newcomers,” and “Sobriety is Surrender: What does THAT Mean?” are available for a recommended donation, as are a variety of workshop recordings.

2. Why does ABA have virtual meetings?

Many people live in places where there are no in-person ABA meetings. Others may not have the ability to travel to in-person meetings. Our virtual meetings are an important means of outreach to these and all anorexics and bulimics who could benefit from our message of hope.

3. Who may attend ABA virtual meetings?

Anyone may attend Open meetings. ***NOTE:*** *If you are the parent of a child under the age of 18, the ABA approach is not suitable for this age group! You are encouraged to seek help from a qualified medical professional.*

Attendance at Closed meetings is limited to those who have a desire to stop unhealthy eating practices. If you think you have a problem with unhealthy eating, you are welcome to participate in Closed meetings. Most meetings request that all who participate in Open or Closed meetings limit their sharing to problems related to their eating disorders, keeping the focus on the ABA Program of recovery.

4. How to attend virtual meetings

Virtual meetings all operate on the same principle: Instead of physically going to a location where you can meet in person with other members, everyone connects via telephone or online app and uses a special access code to enter the virtual meeting “room.”

Be aware that ABA does not have a preferred company that it uses for virtual meetings. Indeed, to do so would be to risk not upholding the Sixth Tradition¹ that we do not endorse outside enterprises. Each meeting and group is autonomous; when a virtual meeting is formed, those ABA members starting the meeting set it up on a virtual meeting service of their choosing. The meeting access information for the virtual meeting you wish to attend may be found at www.aba12steps.org.

5. How do virtual meetings proceed?

- Our Fourth Tradition says that “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or ABA as a whole.” Therefore, each meeting has its own personality. If you don’t feel a connection with one, please try another!

The most common types of meetings are:

- “Topic” meetings, where the chairperson chooses an ABA topic for discussion; generally, members will be asked to participate in reading some chosen ABA literature on the topic before the chair opens the meeting for discussion. When newcomers are present, it is highly suggested to focus the reading and topic on the newcomer (e.g., the 12 FAQs for Newcomers document).
 - “Speaker” meetings, where a sober member is asked to share his or her personal experience of the drug to which s/he was addicted, what happened to get him or her to ABA and sober in the unique way that ABA alone defines sobriety, and what life is like now as a result of living the Twelve Steps in sobriety. Some groups prefer that members who speak have a minimum period of continuous ABA sobriety.
 - “Newcomers” meetings, where the topic is always focused on the newcomer.
 - “Step, Tradition, ABA text or Big Book Study” meetings.
- All ABA meetings are strongly encouraged to use the “Preamble for Meetings” found on pp. 142-148 of the ABA textbook and at www.aba12steps.org. Some meetings decide to supplement the Preamble with information specific to virtual meetings or to the particular group (e.g., mute/unmute instructions, guidelines for sharing, etc.). This information is read aloud during the meeting.
 - *Note that in some meetings you will be automatically muted when you enter the virtual meeting room, and in others you will be unmuted.* Please stay muted when you are not speaking in order to avoid background noise, static, and echo for others in the meeting.

¹ The Twelve Traditions of Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous are suggested guidelines that promote unity within and between groups. See ABA textbook pp. 145-146 or www.aba12steps.org for a full listing.

- When it is time for introductions, members are invited to unmute one at a time and give their first names. *No attendee is required to introduce him or herself.* It is encouraged that newcomers receive a special welcome – perhaps they are invited to stay after the meeting to ask questions or get contact information of sober members.
- At meetings that invite open sharing, members who wish to share their personal experience, strength, and hope on the topic are encouraged to unmute and say their name, or the chairperson may call on members one at a time and ask if they wish to share. Newcomers are invited to share anything related to their eating disorder. Some meetings elect to have a timekeeper and limit members' shares so more have an opportunity to share. When a member completes sharing, he or she may be asked to leave contact information. *No one is compelled to share anything and no one is required to leave contact information.* After sharing, the member mutes his or her line and returns to listening to others. *One person speaks at a time, and we refrain from interrupting when someone else is speaking.*
- Some meetings invite attendees to stay past the designated meeting for “Fellowship.” When attendees stay after a virtual meeting to chat they may share about recovery, but they may also share about outside issues. It is no longer an official ABA meeting and therefore members may not adhere to the meeting protocols and uphold the Twelve Traditions.

6. What is the cost of the virtual connection?

The cost to each person varies depending on the meeting's platform and the method of connection. Teleconferencing generally utilizes toll dial-in numbers. Check with your service provider to ensure that your plan covers the particular area code of the conference-call number. Some people without long-distance plans use phone cards to make the call more affordable. To conserve data usage on a mobile plan when connecting through an app, you can turn off video and/or use WiFi instead.

7. Anonymity

The 11th and 12th Traditions of ABA deal with anonymity; anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions. That means we don't talk to people outside the meeting about who we saw or heard at a meeting or about what a particular person said. (However, when sharing, it is acceptable to say, “I once heard someone say”) We avoid all gossip and criticism of others. The Traditions also suggest that we don't share publicly (through print media, photographs, TV, internet, social media, etc.) that we ourselves belong to ABA. Anonymity protects both ABA members and the Fellowship itself.

8. The value of other 12-Step Fellowships

Many ABA members suffer from other addictions besides their eating disorder, and thus need to participate in other Fellowships (AA, NA, Al-Anon, etc.). ABA members who don't identify as members of other Fellowships often benefit from attending *open* meetings of AA or NA, especially if their ABA support is limited to virtual meetings. There is no substitute for meeting in person with others in recovery and hearing their experience, strength, and hope emerging from working the 12-Step Program. This is discussed in our textbook on p 154.

Our experience is that supplementing ABA membership with attendance at “food fellowships” such as Overeaters Anonymous and Food Addicts Anonymous can be confusing due to their incompatibility with ABA’s unique definition of the “drug” to which we are addicted and the concept of “sobriety” that naturally follows this definition. In ABA, we are not addicted to food; we are addicted to the feeling of being in control of our food, our weight, and our body shape. We do not “abstain” from particular foods; we surrender all control of our food, weight, and body shape to a Higher Power. (See ABA textbook, pp 58-65). (See also, “12 FAQs for Newcomers,” and “Sobriety is Surrender: What does THAT Mean?” documents). To do so could be quite confusing, blurring the unique message of ABA.²

9. The 7th Tradition and financial contributions

There are no dues or fees for ABA membership. The 7th Tradition states that ABA is self-supporting, declining outside contributions; our members and groups are the sole support for the worldwide service structure of our Fellowship. Some virtual meetings have an elected Treasurer who receives members’ donations toward the audio/video-conferencing hosting fee, newcomer packets, etc. and sends to the GSA anything above and beyond the group’s prudent reserve. At other virtual meetings, members are invited to send GSA donations directly to the GSA office by mailing a check through parcel post or by credit or debit card through online means. The actual monetary contribution from members and groups is less important than the spiritual principle of participation. This is what keeps ABA alive.

10. Service work in ABA

Service work – being helpful to others – is an important tool we have found useful in maintaining sobriety. In early days, we are encouraged to read aloud when volunteers are asked for during the meeting, to phone fellow members to ask how they are doing, or to attend group business meetings. Once we have been sober and working the Twelve Steps of ABA for a time, we become ready to chair meetings, take calls from newcomers, and eventually sponsor others. Some of us who were not-yet or newly sober jumped at the chance to take on trusted servant positions, and we found ourselves deprived of time and energy needed for our early recovery work. We encourage all new members to consult their sponsors or other sober members to hear their experiences and suggestions in this regard.

² We do not believe that we have a monopoly on the path to recovery from the psychospiritual component of anorexia and bulimia, that we have found the only solution that can work. We have met people who have found a different road to health, and we are happy for them. We, however, found no deep healing until we reached the ABA Program, and we wish to offer our experience to anyone who desires to hear it. (ABA text, p. xvi). The Food Fellowships also usually welcome anorexics and bulimics. We encourage those of you who cannot relate to our stories to explore these options, and others. (ABA text, p. 44).