

When You Call AA

Almost every city has a listing in its telephone directory for Alcoholics Anonymous, a voluntary, non-profit association in which alcoholics try to help each other overcome drinking problems. Because each AA group is autonomous--there are no national officers or rules--operating procedures depend on the size and facilities of the local AA organization. But whenever possible, AA groups attempt to maintain a round-the-clock answering service. A person's first call to the AA will generally be handled this way:

Although there is no "sermonizing," the AA member receiving the call tries to determine whether it's the caller himself, or herself, who really wants help. Sometimes the call comes from an alcoholic's family or friends, and in such cases, the AA will not usually assist unless it is assured the call is being made at the alcoholic's own request.

The caller, if he or she (about one out of five members is a woman) is physically able, is invited to come at once to the AA clubhouse, office, or a member's home to start learning about the AA program. If the alcoholic is physically unable or reluctant for other reasons

to visit the AA immediately, the AA will go to him. In cities where there are large AA organizations (its world-wide membership is an estimated 200,000), an AA member often visits the caller within an hour. What happens on that first visit is not always the same. Usually, however, and again without any lecturing, the AA member first attempts to show the alcoholic that he and his fellow members all understand the problem because they've gone through the same mental anguish and physical suffering themselves. And the alcoholic is told that the AA offers a way to stop drinking, if he sincerely wants to quit.

When the caller sounds as if he needs prompt medical attention, the AA tries to get it to him.

Above all, the caller's anonymity is respected. No full names or addresses are taken unless the information is necessary in arranging medical assistance.

If AA is not listed in your city's phone directory, the location of the nearest group can be obtained from Alcoholics Anonymous, Post Office Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, New York.