

ADVOCACY WITH ANONYMITY

**Recovery
Advocacy Toolkit**

MAKING OUR VOICES COUNT

Recovery

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How can we stand up for our rights while honoring the anonymity tradition of our twelve-step groups?

Frequently Asked Questions about ADVOCACY WITH ANONYMITY...

Here are some questions that may help you think about how you can tell others what recovery means to you and your family.

Q: It sounds like we can be advocates as long as we don't mention our twelve-step groups. Isn't that still harmful?

A: Absolutely not. There is a long and rich tradition of people in recovery speaking out as advocates. It is one way to let our friends and neighbors put a face on recovery. In fact, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were on the founding board of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), the nation's oldest advocacy group. Bill Wilson remembered this important event in a 1958 Grapevine article:

Then came Marty Mann (NCADD founder). As a recovered alcoholic, she knew that public attitudes had to be changed, that alcoholism was a disease and that alcoholics could be helped. She developed a plan for an organization to conduct a vigorous plan of public education and to organize citizens' committees all over the country. She brought the plan to me. I was enthusiastic.

"I do not at any time represent a 12-step recovery program. I say I'm a man in long-term recovery. At the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR), we have hundreds of other people who do the same thing."

Phillip Valentine, Executive Director, CCAR, Hartford, Connecticut

Q: Why does the recovery community need to organize and advocate for policies that support long-term recovery?

A: To make recovery a reality for even more Americans, we must become visible. You are the living proof that there are solutions to alcoholism and addiction. By adding your voice we can change the focus to the solution: treatment and long-term recovery.

Almost two-thirds of Americans have friends or family members who have struggled with addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Together, we can break down the wall of shame and stigma that keeps people from finding their path to long-term recovery. We can work for greater access to treatment and recovery support and make it possible for future generations of children and families to build communities that are healthier for all of us.

Q: If I recovered through Alcoholics Anonymous or another twelve-step group, how do I talk about my recovery in the media without referring to AA or my mutual support group?

A: Faces & Voices of Recovery has developed language that you can use to talk about your recovery that doesn't mention any particular pathway.

"I'm an advocate so my kids don't have to suffer with addiction like I did."

Joe Powell, in long-term recovery,
Association of Persons Affected by Addiction, Dallas, Texas

I'm (your name) and I am in long-term recovery, which means that I have not used (insert alcohol or drugs or the name of the drugs that you used) for more than (insert the number of years that you are in recovery) years. I am committed to recovery because it has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future, while helping me gain stability in my life. I am now speaking out because long-term recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for others to do the same.

You can also simply say, "I found recovery through a twelve-step group, but our traditions do not permit me to name it in the media" or if you are an Al-Anon member, you can simply say, "I'm a family member in recovery from a relative or friend's alcoholism."

Q: How can I get involved?

A: There are many ways that you can speak out and get involved. Each person supports recovery in his or her own way. You can:

- ◇ Get training and tell your recovery story.
- ◇ Join a recovery advocacy organization in your community.
- ◇ Educate yourself about the issues.
- ◇ Volunteer and provide recovery support to people returning to your community from treatment or incarceration.
- ◇ Provide financial support for recovery advocacy in your community.
- ◇ Write letters, call, or visit your elected officials.

Q: How do I tell my story?

A: Your personal story can be very powerful. The way that stories are shared among those in recovery may not resonate with the general public because frequently they focus on your periods of active addiction. Practice and training can help you learn the most important points to make and the language that will get your story across. Focus on recovery and on barriers that prevent people from getting treatment and sustaining their recovery. Here are a few pointers for you to use when you talk about your recovery and what it means to you:

1. Make it personal.
2. Keep it simple and in the present tense, so that it's real and understandable.
3. Help people understand that recovery means that you, or the person that you care about, are no longer using alcohol or other drugs. You can do this by saying "long-term recovery," talking about stability and mentioning the length of time that you or that person have been in recovery.
4. Talk about your recovery, not your addiction.
5. Help people understand that there's more to recovery than not using alcohol or other drugs, and that part of recovery is creating a better life.

Q: Where should I speak out?

A: Start by talking with one other person, a friend or neighbor or a small group. As you become more comfortable, expand your audience. As you gain more experience, you may want to speak publicly or privately with your city council, state legislators or other public officials. You can coordinate your advocacy work with others.

“I didn't compromise my anonymity when I told my state legislators about my long-term recovery and how much money we'd save if we invested in access to treatment and recovery.”

Jeannie Villarreal, in long-term recovery, Recovery Advocates for Treatment, Vallejo, California

Q: How can I advocate if I am uncomfortable speaking publicly?

A: There are many ways to support recovery. You can write letters to your local newspaper responding to an article; or submit an Op-Ed piece on topics like expanding insurance coverage for treatment or making recovery housing available to people newly in recovery. Write to or visit your elected officials, or invite them to activities that you are involved in. Your very presence may break some stereotypes they may hold. Policy makers often relate best to real, human stories of their constituents and your story will help them understand how policies impact people who are rebuilding their lives.

Q: How do I start?

A: As with most activities in our lives, you will need to get comfortable by seeking support and guidance from people you trust. If there's not a recovery community organization in your area yet, it may make the most sense to join together with a few others and map out a strategy for getting started. That way, if you are new to public speaking for example, you can practice with each other and then move out into the community.

“Our experience shows that when people in recovery talk, policy makers sit up and listen. Together, we have a powerful message and as a result of our advocacy efforts, more people get help today than ever before! But, we need to do more!”

Benjamin A. Jones, Executive Director,
NCADD-Greater Detroit Area

The most important thing is getting started. Here are some common sense things to think about as you move forward:

- ◇ No recovering person should advocate publicly if his or her sobriety, job or financial well-being will be put into jeopardy.
- ◇ No recovering person should advocate at the level of public media unless he or she has two years of recovery.
- ◇ You may disclose your identity and speak as a person in long-term recovery so long as your membership in a particular program of recovery is not revealed.

Here is another thought from Bill Wilson to keep in mind as we proceed together:

So let us hasten to work alongside those projects of promise to hasten the recovery of millions who have not yet found their way out. These varied labors do not need our special endorsement; they need only a helping hand, when, as individuals, we can possibly give it.

There are tens of thousands of men and women across our country just like you who want to speak out about their recovery experiences while honoring the principles that have worked so well for so many. This pamphlet answers questions that people who want to speak out are asking as they think about how to share their experiences and make it possible for others to get the help they need. Here's what one person has to say,

I'm feeling better in my sobriety as I work a twelve-step program and am grateful for the blessings it has brought me. I want to reach out and help others who are still in the throes of active addiction or struggling in their recovery because of discriminatory policies and practices.

I hear the terms 'advocacy' and 'anonymity' all the time, but I'm not sure what they mean or how they apply to me. What can I do to help alcoholics and addicts who have not yet recovered? How can I increase the public's understanding of addiction and recovery?

You can speak out publicly without compromising the principles of the recovery program in which you participate. By doing so, you will be reaching out to alcoholics, addicts, their families - providing them with new hope – and educating policy makers. If you too are in long-term recovery, or are a family member of someone in long-term recovery and want to speak out about what it means to you and your family, this pamphlet will help you feel more comfortable with how you can do just that.

ANONYMITY...

The principle of anonymity was established to assure a safe place for people to recover and keep focused on their primary purpose of helping alcoholics and addicts to recover.

...at the level of the media, is the cornerstone principle of many twelve-step groups and recovery programs. It is an essential element of success because it gives the recovering person the protection he/she needs from scrutiny.

...also plays a crucial role in establishing personal humility, which is a cornerstone of the spiritual foundation of recovery. Here are the traditions that lay out the principle of anonymity as it applies to many twelve-step groups.

Tradition 6

"A [twelve-step group] ought never endorse, finance or lend the [twelve-step group] name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

Tradition 10

"The [twelve-step group] has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the [twelve-step group] ought never to be drawn into any public controversy."

Tradition 11

"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

So, this means that **you can speak about your own recovery and advocate for the rights of others**, as long as you do not involve the twelve-step group by name.