

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO AA HOTLINE CALLS 3/2010

NOTE: These guidelines are offered to the AA Volunteer who receives a call transferred from the AA Hot Line by the Community Help Centre (CHC) Volunteer. The guidelines were compiled by the folks who attended the AA HotLine Workshop in State College, PA in March, 2010. Thanks to all who participated in the Workshop, and to all the call-answering volunteers, from AA and from the CHC.

1. Plan ahead about your policies related to answering calls: what information about yourself will you share with a caller; what kinds of conversations may make you uncomfortable, and how do you plan to deal with them; what resources do you need to have available to help callers; what kind of support for yourself do you need to have available if you encounter a situation that you don't know how to respond to, etc.
2. Seek out the support of someone who has experience responding to HotLine calls, in advance and in the moment, if you are unsure of how to respond to a caller's questions and needs – perhaps your sponsor or someone with more time in AA than you have, or someone who has done HotLine work in the past.
3. Always keep your own anonymity and personal safety uppermost in your mind when responding to calls – it has been strongly recommended that you do not offer to meet a caller face-to-face or to provide a ride to a meeting. However, you can help the caller arrange for a taxi or public transportation, if you have that information handy when taking a call.
4. Always take someone with you if you feel you must go physically to provide 12th Step service, and plan to meet in a public place. If you recommend a particular meeting that you also plan to attend, let someone inside know if you decide to meet the caller outside, or wait until they come inside before deciding if you will identify yourself – if the person is acting erratically, apparently under the influence, or it seems otherwise not a good idea to make yourself known, you will be able to make that choice. Remember Step 2 – we are insane until we come to believe that a Higher Power can restore us.
5. It has been strongly recommended that you do not give out your phone number to Hot Line callers for repeat calls. If you give the caller your first name, they can call the AA HotLine again if they want to talk to you some more, and the CHC Volunteer may be able to transfer the call to you a second time. If you get the caller's phone number with plans to call them back, remember that your phone number may show up on their caller ID – in this age of information, any phone number should be presumed to be traceable to a physical location.
6. Many transferred HotLine calls are from newcomers seeking information about how AA works, and encouragement for getting to their first meeting – you can

offer the local District 43 AA website (www.District43.com) or the general AA website if the caller's questions are about information you do not have: www.aa.org The CHC Volunteers typically do not refer calls that are strictly about times and locations of meetings, because they have that information to offer themselves.

7. The CHC Volunteers do try to screen calls so that they can make appropriate referrals; however, the caller may not always be accurate about the nature of the problem, or the CHC Volunteer may have to make a judgment call about what will be most helpful. If the call is something you feel ill-equipped to handle, you can simply tell the caller that their problems are beyond your ability to help and refer them back to the CHC HelpLine: 814-235-1890, or to 911 in the case of medical or safety emergency. It is a good idea also to let the CHC HelpLine folks know that you have referred the caller because you are unable to help. Some kinds of problems that are beyond the scope of the AA Traditions are: requests for referrals to rehabs, therapists, or detox facilities; support for family members of alcoholics; situations where someone is in danger or someone is threatening dangerous behavior; calls from people who are verbally abusive or apparently intoxicated.
8. Please remember that the CHC volunteers are volunteers just as you are, partners in the effort to help alcoholics in Centre County. When they transfer a call to you, it is because you have indicated that you are willing to work with them in this effort – they do their best to match the caller's gender, time of call, and general location to the information you have provided, but sometimes they are unable to reach a more appropriate AA volunteer. They will be making their best effort to be helpful, by calling you. You can always refuse to accept a transferred call, and you can request more information from the CHC volunteer before deciding to accept or refuse the call. Please keep in mind that the caller is on hold while you are talking to the CHC volunteer, and that every minute of waiting can be experienced as excruciatingly challenging to someone who is struggling with a craving.
9. If your phone number or availability changes, or you decide to stop participating in this aspect of AA service, please let the CHC folks know by calling the AA HotLine: 814-237-3757. The current plan of the AA HotLine committee is to update the AA HotLine Volunteer list every six months, Spring and Fall. Be sure to ask your Home Group GSR about the next edition of the list if you don't hear anything about it a couple of times each year. You will need to sign up again every time the new list comes around, if you wish to be included as a Hot Line Volunteer. Please share this important opportunity to work the 12th Step with your sponsees when they are ready for it.
10. Thank you again for participating in this AA service work!