

American River Area of Narcotics Anonymous



HELPLINE HANDBOOK


A.R.A.N.A. Helpline

1-800-600-4676


Revised: May 2014

Introduction

The primary purpose of Narcotics Anonymous is to stay clean and carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. By far, the best way to make ourselves available to those who need help is to provide a “Helpline” phone service. Someone can call and talk anonymously to a recovering addict 24 hours a day. The suffering addict can call this number without fear, get meeting times and locations and receive information about Narcotics Anonymous.



**The Helpline’s main goal is
to get the addict to a meeting
of Narcotics Anonymous.**



Volunteer Policies

The suggested requirements for American River Area Narcotics Anonymous (A.R.A.N.A) Helpline Volunteers are “that they be active members of Narcotics Anonymous, attend meetings regularly and have six months clean time.” Your prompt and regular availability at the time of your shift is imperative. If you are unable to cover your shift, please be responsible and notify the Helpline Coordinator.

Remember: *you are likely to be the first contact a person has had with Narcotics Anonymous.* When speaking with callers, remain objective and non-argumentative. A warm, friendly voice will go a long way to reassure a frightened, uneasy person in need of help.

Remember, we do not endorse or make recommendations about any other programs or agencies. If another program is part of your experience strength and hope, be sure the caller understands that no outside program is affiliated with, or recommended by, the program of Narcotics Anonymous. If the caller insists on information about specific treatment facilities, suggest they look in the 'Yellow Pages' under Drug Abuse. (For a list of other helpful local referral numbers, please see page 11).

Try to keep calls brief, because it is important to keep the Helpline open to other addicts in need. Never give the names or phone numbers of other Helpline Volunteers or any members of Narcotics Anonymous to the callers, regardless of the circumstances. Do not give the caller your home phone number.

Sometimes you will receive calls related to other Narcotics Anonymous 'business'. This could be someone wanting to start a new area meeting, have schedules sent to them, inquiring about a one-time speaking engagement, a treatment facility wanting to start a meeting, etc. Always keep in mind that the basic premise of our program is anonymity, so we never give out members' contact information to callers. When you receive these calls, take down pertinent information - the caller's name and phone number, and the subject of their call - and contact the appropriate Area Officer or Sub-Committee Chairperson yourself. Do not attempt to help these callers yourself. Let them know you will be passing on their name and phone number to the person responsible for that job. Relay the message to the correct person as soon as possible. If you are leaving your message with an answering machine or voicemail, be sure you leave your name and number and request confirmation that your message has been received.

You shouldn't feel compelled to harbor doubts or frustrations about your position as a Helpline Volunteer. Remember that we are here to support each other and

that you are providing a valuable service for Narcotics Anonymous and your fellow addicts. If you run into problems or have any questions, please call the Helpline Coordinator right away.

Preparing for Your Shift

Being a Helpline Volunteer is not a responsibility to take lightly. Take a few minutes before your shift starts to gather material that will be helpful when you are taking calls. This is a good time to make sure that your meeting schedule and other information is accurate and up-to-date. It is better to give no information than wrong information! You can always refer to our website at www.sacramentona.org for meeting schedules, current local event, and other helpful information, and you can even direct the caller there for more details. In addition to the current A.R.A.N.A meeting schedule, you should also have a copy of this Helpline Handbook with you whenever possible, as it is an invaluable source of referral information. These documents are vital to your success as a Helpline Volunteer.

Common Helpline Calls

While most calls taken by the phone line are routine in nature, occasionally a crisis call may arise. Always take these calls seriously. When you have established that that caller is in crisis, quickly refer the caller to the appropriate telephone number from the Community Service Referral List. It is imperative to remember that you are not a crisis counselor, doctor, lawyer or psychologist. The NA helpline is strictly for dispensing information about the NA fellowship meetings and recovery. Calls that are not within this scope should be quickly and politely diverted.

Calls from Relatives, Friends and Lovers

The first question is “Does the addict want help?” If the answer is no, then unfortunately nothing further can be done for the addict at this time. If the addict does want help, then you can ask “does the person know you are calling Narcotics Anonymous?” and “Is the person there now?” If the person is there and willing to talk, then try to have the addict come to the phone. If the addict won’t come to the phone, then give the meeting information to the friend and encourage them to go to a meeting together.

Addiction is a disease that affects the whole family or environment where a using addict lives. Therefore, many calls come from family or friends of addicts. Narcotics Anonymous does not deal with problems between people. However, by listing ourselves in the telephone directory, we invite calls from the public. We ought to treat callers kindly and talk to anyone who reaches out for help. Families and friends of addicts often feel isolated and ashamed, so it is important to take a little time with these people because they may be reaching out for the first time. They need and deserve encouragement.

These people are in direct contact with the addict and are affected by their addiction. These callers should be briefly informed about Narcotics Anonymous.

Suicide Calls

Fortunately these do not come in very often, but we do sometimes receive them and should ready to know how to handle them. These calls can make us feel very uncomfortable. It is essential to recognize that ***we are not trained in suicide prevention***. We can best help by putting these callers in contact with people who are best trained to help them. Urge them to call the local suicide prevention line (see phone referral section). ***Always*** take a suicide call seriously! If the caller has taken an overdose, time may be very short. If the caller isn’t able

to call 911 then see if you can get their address so you can call 911 for them. Hang up and turn it over. You have done all you could.

Overdose

Probable or Possible: If the caller has overdosed, **first** try to get them to call 911. If you remain calm it will have a helpful effect on your caller. Do what you can in situations like this. **Under no circumstances should you give medical advice.**

What is the Narcotics Anonymous Program?

NA is a non-profit society, or fellowship of men and women for whom drugs have become a major problem. We are recovering addicts to meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership; the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.

There are no strings attached to NA. We are not affiliated with any other organizations, have no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only

keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. We make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature or our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
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 film.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Misconceptions about Narcotics Anonymous

- Narcotics Anonymous does not operate Detox units, recovery or halfway houses, and is not affiliated with such facilities in any way.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not crusade, solicit or advertise for members to join us.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not engage in/or sponsor research.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not keep membership records or case histories.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not follow-up on members or in any way try to control them.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not provide medical or psychological diagnoses, nor provide marriage, family or vocational counseling.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not provide welfare or other social services.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not conduct religious services of any kind.
- Narcotics Anonymous does not accept money for its services, is not funded by public or private sources, and accepts no contributions from non-member's

Do's

- Do always have the necessary materials (e.g., handbook, meeting list, white booklet, NA pamphlets) close to the telephone, to avoid delay and confusion.
- Do find out what the caller needs. Ask questions.
- Do keep calls brief, calm and polite.
- Do respect anonymity
- Do your absolute best to always relay accurate information.

Don'ts

- Don't argue with people whose views of addiction differ from yours or NA's. If the caller does not want to stop using, do not try to persuade him/her to stop.
- Don't try to handle calls that you are not qualified to answer.
- Don't give medical advice.
- Don't give out other people's names or telephone numbers nor answer questions about who was at an NA meeting (e.g., to police officers, probation officers, or significant others).
- Don't glorify active addiction by telling war stories.
- Don't ever, ever put yourself at risk by picking up or meeting a newcomer alone. In the event you choose to meet a newcomer, always bring another recovering addict with you & meet in a neutral, public location.

Community Referral List

The following information is provided as a courtesy for callers. We can refer to these numbers when the caller is asking for help that does not fall within our primary purpose or contradicts our Traditions. We offer this information in the spirit of cooperation, and must always keep in mind that Narcotics Anonymous does not endorse any agency or facility.

*In Sacramento, as with many parts of the United States and Canada, a community services helpline can be reached by dialing 211. This may be the easiest referral number to give out.

Sacramento Crisis Nursery	(916) 679-3600
Child Protective Services (C.P.S)	(916) 875-5437
Domestic Violence/WEAVE	(916) 920-2952
Sacramento Co. Mental Health Crisis Intervention	(916) 732-3637
California Poison Control System	1-800-222-1222
National Sexual Assault Hotline	1-800-656-HOPE
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	1-800-273-TALK
*For Veterans, 1-800-273-TALK, then press "1" to reach the VA Hotline	
Treatment Referrals	1-800-662-4357
(Also: Sacramento County Alcohol and Drug Services	(916) 874-9754)
Sacramento Veterans Resource Center	(916) 393-VETS

REFERRAL FORM

For referring calls to the area or region:

There are times when trusted servants within the area or at the regional service committee may be more experienced with answering certain phone line requests. When referring someone to an administrative person of our area or subcommittee chair, remember to never give out their personal phone number. Use the referral form and ask for the caller's information so the appropriate person can call them back. It's important to get as much detail as possible from the caller so the person calling back will be well informed of the request. Please use the following form as a guide for gathering the information that you will pass on.

Today's date _____ Time of call _____

Helpline Volunteer _____

Caller's name _____

Name of agency or organization _____

Caller's telephone number _____ ext. _____

Alternate telephone number _____

Time & date when caller is available to be called back _____

Caller or agency's email address _____

Reason(s) for calling:

Atmosphere of recovery issue

Leadership issue

Predator issue

Public image issue

Request from media

Problem with meeting at facility

Request for NA literature

Request for meeting directories

Request for meeting at facility

Request for NA presentation

Request for activities schedule

Other: _____

Additional information: _____

Referred request to: **Area** **Region**

Committee member's name and position: _____

Helpful Helpline FAQ's

- **How do I find a meeting?** It is always suggested to have a current meeting schedule with you during your shift. If you have misplaced your schedule, you can always go to our area fellowship website, www.sacramentona.org . Right at the top of our homepage is a link that will take you to our meeting finder. You can search by days of the week, specific areas within Sacramento that are supported by the American River Area of Narcotics Anonymous, or a by a variety of other specific filters. Sometimes it is helpful to use Google Maps or something similar – if the caller is comfortable with giving you their nearest cross streets or address, you can search for meetings nearby to them. You can also pass the website on to the caller for their future use as well.
- **What if an addict calls to tell us the meeting is not there?** First, take down this information and get it to the PR Committee Chair (contact information located on the schedule). The PR Chair will get the information to the appropriate person on the committee so they can go and check out the meeting and, if necessary, make the changes in the meeting schedule. After you've taken down the information, help the person locate an alternate meeting.
- **What's the difference between an open and closed meeting?** An open meeting of Narcotics Anonymous is open to anyone – the addict, their family members, and children – anyone who chooses to attend. The closed meetings are limited to addicts only.
- **What if I miss a call?** The Helpline system is set up with checks and balances. Each call is directed to the Volunteer whom is scheduled for that time slot. In the event the scheduled Volunteer misses the call (**please try not to do this!**) the call is not dropped. Instead it rolls over to the person who is scheduled in the next immediate time slot. If the second number does not answer, there is a Helpline Rollover volunteer scheduled to answer calls that roll past both people. Even with these three fail-safes, sometimes calls can be missed. The last thing we want is for an addict seeking help to not be able to reach us!! The other two people who provide your backup do not necessarily know they should be expecting to receive a Helpline call. **If you are** in a position where you will be **unable to answer your** calls for a **shift** please

contact the Helpline Coordinator so arrangements can be made to ensure that addicts seeking support will be able to find it when they need it.

- **What if someone is looking for a detox or treatment facility?** NA does not endorse outside agencies or facilities. Please see the list of general referral numbers on page 11 of the Helpline Handbook and offer a county, state or federal support number to the caller. (If you feel compelled to offer suggestions based on your own experience, you need to abide by our Traditions and let the caller know that it is only your opinion and is NOT endorsed by Narcotics Anonymous.)
- **What if someone is looking for an out-of-state meeting?** Direct them to www.na.org or to the Helpline of whichever fellowship is nearest to their destination. Locating meeting information other than in our area fellowship can be problematic since we have no way of knowing if the information is current and correct.
- **What if someone calls asking questions about specific drugs, their effects, or our experience with them?** Tell the caller that, while you are an addict, your objective is to provide information related to recovery, not drug use. Let the caller know that NA isn't interested in what or how much you used but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. Bring the conversation back to locating a meeting for them
- **What if the caller is high or “can't stop” using?** Tell them that only requirement for membership in NA is the desire to stop using. They are welcome to attend any meeting regardless, provided they don't bring drugs or paraphernalia on their person. Suggest they don't drive themselves to a meeting while they are still under the influence.
- **What if you don't know the answer to a question?** Take down contact information, let them know you'll return their call, and let them off the line. Seek out the appropriate information or pass it on to the appropriate person. When calling them back, make sure you've established that the addict is on the phone before identifying yourself as a member of Narcotics Anonymous.

- **What if people get frustrated with you while you are trying to help them?** You never know what the caller is going through. Sometimes it can help to disarm the situation simply by letting the caller know that you are simply another addict who is volunteering your time on the Helpline. As we know, many times just being able to connect and identify with someone in that way can be a huge relief. It is always best to keep our voice calm and courteous, but we do not have to allow ourselves to be abused.

- **What if I receive calls from healthcare professionals, students, members of the media, or general members of the public?** These calls are usually requests for general information about NA or requests for our participation at a function. Always take down their request, name and contact information to pass the information on to the Public Relations Committee Chairperson. (Please see the Referral Form on the last page of this Handbook for guidance.)

- **What if the caller wants to volunteer on the Helpline or join another Committee/Sub-Committee?** If someone calls that wants to volunteer for the Helpline, get their number and forward it to the Helpline Coordinator. Otherwise, you can direct them to the Committee/Sub-Committee Meeting (they are all listed in the meeting schedule).

- **What if the caller just wants to talk?** The Helpline's primary purpose is to get the caller to a meeting. If they need to talk to someone, suggest that they contact their sponsor, support group, or a therapist. Let them know you have to keep the line open for addicts in crisis who are looking for a meeting.