

A.A.[®] Guidelines

Corrections Committees

from GSO, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an *informed* group conscience.

HOW A.A.s CARRY THE MESSAGE TO ALCOHOLICS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

The material in these Guidelines has come from the experience and growing pains of A.A. corrections and Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) committees. We are privileged to share it with A.A.s throughout the United States and Canada who are carrying our message behind the walls. Additional information is available in the Corrections section of GSO's website at www.aa.org or you can contact GSO's Corrections Desk (corrections@aa.org) directly.

PURPOSE

The purpose of a corrections committee is to coordinate the work of individual A.A. members and groups who are interested in carrying our message of recovery to alcoholics behind the walls, and to set up means of smoothing the way from the facility to the larger A.A. community through prerelease contacts.

A corrections committee may function within the structure of a General Service Conference area committee or an intergroup/central office. As A.A. has grown, it seems that a committee formed within the A.A. service structure works more effectively than an individual member or group.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Perhaps the first step would be to contact your local area committee and, if there is an existing corrections committee, they will connect you to the corrections chairperson. Local A.A. groups and members also have the opportunity to participate in corrections Twelfth Step work by electing a corrections group representative. It has proved a good idea to have members from many groups serve on this committee. If a corrections committee does not exist in your district, then you may wish to form one. Thus, a chairperson is elected, and plans are worked out so that each correctional facility group will be assured of A.A. help. The corrections chairperson often participates with the area, district or intergroup committee. The chairperson also relays information from the Conference Committee on Corrections, held annually at the General Service Conference, and shares Conference thinking and experience on A.A. in corrections service work.

If you are a new committee, please list your corrections committee with the General Service Office in New York by contacting GSO's Corrections Desk (corrections@aa.org) or Records department. Your chairperson will be put on a mailing list and receive a Corrections Workbook and other service material.

The Corrections Workbook is a good basic tool. It contains information on how to do corrections work, background information, guide letters, and a selection of pamphlets, leaflets, etc., and may provide new ideas or new ways of implementing old ideas.

The Corrections page on the GSO website also provides other service material, including the newsletter "Sharing from Behind the Walls," videos, and prerelease and correspondence forms.

RELATIONSHIP TO A.A. IN THE AREA OR DISTRICT

A corrections committee shares with local meetings about the various service opportunities available to carry our message to alcoholics behind bars, or to help with the transition from a facility into the larger A.A. fellowship. They are also the point of contact for any questions and concerns about Twelve Step work at a corrections facility. Some individual groups have a corrections representative who attends the committee meetings. Corrections committees coordinate special events or corrections workshops for interested or participating A.A. members including clearance paperwork in cooperation with the local or state facilities; correspondence and prerelease contacts; funding literature requests; and orientation about bringing an A.A. meeting or information into a facility.

As in all A.A. activity, communication of needs and progress is important. Corrections committees usually meet either as an individual committee or before or after a local district or area committee; on a monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly basis. The committee also participates in area and district meetings where they can highlight shared experiences and communicate needs, including literature requests. The Trustees' Committee on Corrections has requested that most literature needs be handled through local committees.

FUNCTIONS OF CORRECTIONS COMMITTEES

The basic functions of corrections committees are described in the Corrections Workbook. However, here are highlights of major headings. Corrections committees, when allowed to do so, take A.A. meetings into facilities within their area. They encourage "outside" group participation in this kind of Twelfth Step work. In some areas, each group has a group corrections representative. The committee provides a liaison between the correctional facilities' groups and meetings and groups on the outside, and also coordinates prerelease contacts. In some areas, Corrections Committees work with CPC and PI committees to help inform probation and parole professionals and other court officers about resources A.A. provides to those who are incarcerated.

In the spirit of cooperation, the relationship with prison authorities is discussed in the workbook to ensure a positive reciprocal working relationship with administrators and staff. A.A. members wishing to carry our message to alcoholics behind the walls of correctional facilities should understand that we always do so within the regulations of such facilities. Corrections Committees and Hospital and Institutions (H&I) Committees are encouraged to thoroughly review and understand all procedures of institutions with whom they cooperate, and to share this information with all A.A. members who bring A.A. meetings inside. Some committees make available copies of regulations and forms that must be completed, so that A.A. members new to this service work can review the materials prior to making their decision. Some committees share this information with A.A. members new to corrections service through regular workshops, information sheets, and volunteer packets developed by local trusted servants.

The workbook also goes into detail about prison A.A. meetings. It suggests different ways to shoulder responsibility for meetings and speakers.

Most committees find that adequate Conference-approved literature and service materials are essential in a correctional facility group or meeting. Such materials are financed and obtained in several ways: donated by local intergroup or general service committee; donated by members of the committee; purchased with individual contributions; provided by groups through their corrections representatives.

Special funds: Buck of the Month Club — where members contribute, and funds are used for corrections literature; special meetings or dinners, at which a collection is taken; special cans at regular meetings, marked “For Corrections Literature.”

Note: Corrections Discount Packages are available from GSO.

PRERELEASE/BRIDGING THE GAP/RE-ENTRY TEMPORARY CONTACTS, ETC.

Experience suggests that with the constant reminder that A.A. has only sobriety to offer, many committees do try to provide prerelease contacts, so transition to outside A.A. is easier.

Past experience has shown that attending an A.A. meeting on the outside on the day of release from prison is one of the most effective tools for a person in custody to maintain continued sobriety. It is strongly recommended that a person in custody who is an A.A. member have an A.A. contact on the outside (preferably with at least one year’s sobriety and of the same sex) to meet on the day of release and help in attending A.A. on the outside. This service is known by a variety of names in the A.A. Fellowship, such as “Bridging the Gap,” “Prerelease,” “Contact Upon Release,” “Temporary Contact,” etc., but all committees do essentially the same type of Twelfth Step service.

This A.A. service is a way for outside A.A.s to meet up with inside A.A.s getting released from prison/jail and accompanying them to

their first few local meetings. This is not intended to be a long-term A.A. relationship, but simply to help ease the newly-released member’s transition to outside A.A. and to help them get started on the road to sobriety in their home community.

More information is available in the Corrections Workbook and in the Corrections section on GSO’s website. Local committees often arrange outside contacts while GSO helps with referrals of persons in custody being released to other areas.

NEWSLETTER

Sharing from Behind the Walls is a newsletter composed of selections of letters from persons in custody sent to GSO. With their permission, persons in custody from the U.S. and Canada contribute. Current and back issues can be printed from the Corrections section of the GSO website. The newsletter is published and mailed three times a year and is available for use in A.A. correctional service.

RELATIONSHIP TO AL-ANON

Many areas report it is extremely helpful to cooperate with Al-Anon Family Groups, in order that the family of the person in custody may gain a better understanding of our Fellowship. For information, contact Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617. Tel: (888) 425-2666. Website: www.al-anon.org

RELATIONSHIP TO GSO

GSO lists corrections chairpersons (U.S. and Canada). The people on this mailing list are sent the following material:

1. *Box 4-5-9* — quarterly
2. Corrections Workbook
3. Activity update from the GSO Corrections desk
4. *Sharing from Behind the Walls* — three times a year

CORRESPONDENCE SERVICE

The Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS), coordinated through GSO, across the U.S. and Canada offers a rewarding opportunity for “A.A.s on the outside” to share experience, strength and hope with incarcerated alcoholics from another region. Helpful guidelines are available to outsiders (F-26) and to insiders (F-73). For more information, please contact GSO’s Corrections Desk: corrections@aa.org

SHARED EXPERIENCE

Please keep in touch with the GSO Corrections Desk (corrections@aa.org) to share your activities and experiences with carrying our A.A. message behind the walls. Doing so will pass it on to help other local committees across the U.S. and Canada as we add your experience to our files and share information in the GSO newsletter, *Box 4-5-9*.