

Suggested Guidelines for ACA Outreach Calls

Outreach calls are an important part of the recovery process.

Together with meetings, sponsorship, reliance on our Higher Power and providing service, outreach calls are a fundamental tool for successfully working the ACA Twelve Step program. Making outreach calls to fellow members in the program helps us break our isolation, relieve our feelings of loneliness, and helps us create or maintain a foundation of emotional sobriety.

By initiating or receiving outreach calls we break the "don't talk, don't trust and don't feel" rule, and with a variety of lessons and skills that are critical to establishing long-term emotional sobriety, we learn:

- How to ask for help.
- We are not alone.
- How to uncover, acknowledge, honour, and communicate our feelings.
- How to become aware of our need for boundaries, how to set them, how to keep them and how to honour and respect the boundaries set by others.
- The important skill of active listening, which we define as being present to what the person speaking is saying and avoiding distractions.
- We learn that sometimes all we need is to be heard and not judged or given advice.

Outreach calls to fellow members are important for both the caller and the person receiving the call. Please do not feel like you are bothering someone by reaching out to them. Other members can set their boundaries when receiving calls. Your outreach may also help the person receiving the call.

It is also important for newcomers to understand that outreach calls are not the same as calls to family and friends, where oftentimes we do not practice vulnerability and honesty about our experience of growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional family. The purpose of outreach calls is to allow us to connect with ourselves, another person and our higher power, rather than an opportunity to "visit" or "catch up". This difference is what makes them fundamental to our recovery.

Outreach calls are also different from calls to a sponsor. While a sponsor is a spiritual guide who helps a member work through the Steps, an outreach fellow member can be anyone who is working the ACA program, whether they are a newcomer or someone who has been working the Step for a while. This document provides suggested guidelines specifically for member-to-member calls, not sponsor-sponsee calls.

Sometimes you will have to call a member more than once. Some members may not be available or ever reply. Do not take this personally; embrace it as an opportunity for growth. We recommend gravitating towards members who are available and who do reply. Don't be afraid to continue to ask for help. If there's someone you have been particularly inspired by at a meeting, you can approach them directly to exchange numbers and ask if it's ok to call them during the break or in the virtual coffee shop after the meeting (an informal fellowshiping time).

Outreach calls ARE:

- An opportunity to connect with fellow members and practice building a healthy relationship with your inner child(ren) and becoming your own loving parent.
- An opportunity to support each other through recovery, especially during situations where we feel triggered and have an impulse to react rather than respond.
- An opportunity to understand how the program worked for someone whose been in the program for some time.
- An opportunity to share the progress we have made and our signs of recovery.
- An opportunity to build accountability as we work the program.
- A reminder that we are not alone.

Outreach calls are NOT:

- A one-way monologue or an excuse for dumping. Dumping is toxic for both, the person making the call and the person receiving it. Both people need to share when possible.
- A therapy session. It is not your job to “fix” or rescue anyone.
- A replacement for going to meetings or calling a sponsor.
- Necessarily lengthy; five to 10 minutes is acceptable.

As the receiver, here are some sample conversation suggestions:

- “I have about ten minutes; maybe you can share for five and I can share for five. Will that work for you?” (Identify the amount of time you have)
- “I only have a few minutes now but I can talk more at...” (Specify the time)
- “I only have a few minutes. How can I best support you now with the time I have?”
- Would you like feedback or would you like for me to just listen?

During an outreach call you are not responsible for:

- Finding solutions to another person’s problems.
- Finding answers to their questions.
- Giving more time or energy than you have available.

For both the initiator and the receiver of an outreach call, here are some ways you can be of service, whether you have a lot of experience in the program or not:

Listening: Listening is as important as talking. We each need to be heard. If we don’t have much time or we are unable to give feedback for whatever reason (i.e. we may be in a loud place or we may not have the desire to talk, but can listen) we can ask the caller if we can provide service by listening. Listening is not only an opportunity to learn something new or to be reminded of our journey in the program -- by listening, we are doing service to another person’s recovery.

Relating: Relating feedback is providing examples of how we relate to what we have heard. It doesn’t have to be an exact parallel to the story we’ve heard. If a caller is describing a relationship with a parent, we can relate to it by describing a relationship with a sibling, if we feel it’s appropriate to share. In relating we must be cautious not to hijack the focus of the share onto us and our story.

Suggestions: *Do not give suggestions or advice unless it's asked for or before you ask permission to give it, i.e.: "Do you want feedback?" and/or "May I make a suggestion?"*

Suggestions are given by providing program tools to face the situation (e.g., working the Steps, prayer/meditation, more outreach calls, more meetings, consulting one's sponsor, surrendering to your Higher Power, or by putting the issue in a God box, etc).

Interrupting may also be an important and healthy part of making and taking outreach calls. It is acceptable to interrupt someone and let them know when your time is up and you need to go. It is helpful to wait for an appropriate pause, but that may not always occur. Therefore, it is important to interrupt as respectfully and politely as possible. Interrupting may also be important and healthy when a fellow member seems to be stuck in their story or the problem (he/she said this, he/she did that) and they can't see or are not willing to see, the solution.

Finally, interrupting may also be important when something the other fellow member has said is triggering to your inner child, emotional sobriety and recovery. For example, inappropriate or overly detailed descriptions of dysfunctional acts.

ACA is a solution-focused program and not a self-help group. We focus on working on the Twelve Steps to achieve emotional sobriety from the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional environment where abuse, neglect and trauma infected us.

Do not take it personally if someone doesn't have much time to talk, doesn't take your call, or doesn't call you back. Keep phoning other members, keep going to meetings and keep working on the program. It will strengthen your recovery, and you will find the peace, serenity and joy you desire. You are not alone anymore as you have your fellow travellers.

When a trusted servant or fellow member receives an outreach call:

We begin with the assumption that the initiator is feeling vulnerable and needs support. This means we answer the call or coordinate a mutually suitable time at the earliest convenience.

- **Return calls at the earliest convenience.** Call back to listen, share and arrange a mutually convenient time or a safe place to meet. Respect each other's time.
- **Share how your experience, strength and hope.** Don't moralize or lecture or brand prospects as "an adult child." That decision is theirs. You can share your Laundry List Traits and other personal experiences of growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional home.
- **Share your understanding of the program.** You can share what emotional sobriety means to you, different Family types, and various roles adult children take in the family. Let the person know that this disease is progressive and can create insanity. You could describe the disease model of ACA including body, mind and spirit that accompanies while growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional home.
- **Share what happened to you.** The prospect will probably want to know about your journey and how long you have been in ACA.
- **Share your ACA experience.** Share how ACA has worked for you and helped you to regain your sanity and maintaining emotional sobriety, how it has led to being willing to believe in a power greater than self. Use everyday language and avoid arousing prejudice against theological terms and conceptions.

- **Share how is ACA now your recovery program.** Outline the ACA program of action and emphasize that this isn't the end of something but the start of a challenging but rewarding way of breaking from survival traits and living based on spiritual principles.
- **Share meeting details, ACA welcome kit and contact sheet.** If you can, then offer to be available for further questions.

How to initiate outreach calls (for the safety of new and old members):

- If an ACA fellow member identifies with someone's sharing in a meeting, they can
- request for the preferred contact details from that member through Zoom Chat, during meeting breaks or in the virtual coffee shop after the meeting, or through the meeting WhatsApp group.
- Once the consent is provided, they can coordinate a mutually agreed time and mode of contact i.e. phone, text, video call, email etc.
- If the group circulates a contact sheet, take the number and coordinate a mutually convenient time.
- Thereafter the call can be made as mutually agreed upon.

Outreach calls come in a wide variety of formats – there is no right or wrong way to do them. Simply ask for what you need at that moment.

Some common formats are:

- **3/3 or 4/4, etc:** both parties speak for 3 to 4 minutes each, one after the other, similar to if you'd be sharing in a meeting. Sometimes people explicitly set a timer and give a 1-minute or so warning.
- **3/3 with feedback:** both parties speak for 3 minutes each, but "crosstalk" is invited and the shares get followed by a period of reflection/feedback/question asking
- **"open" calls:** like a regular conversation, you just talk and see where that takes you!
- **"themed" outreach call:** a person might have a specific goal, e.g. receive advice on an amend they are thinking about making, speak a shared prayer, ask for advice on a specific step, etc

None of these formats are better or worse than others, they are just different and you might find yourself preferring some over others in different situations. In your outreach request, you can be specific about what you are looking for – that context helps other fellows to see e.g. whether they have enough open time right now to respond.

Outreach call etiquettes are important to create and practice respectful and safe interactions for both members.

Some good points to keep in mind:

- Connect at the mutually agreed time and if for any reason you're not able to call or available to receive the call at that time, please inform the other person timely as they have kept this time especially for you.
- It's a good habit to ask about the time limits the other person has (do they have 5? 15? 45 minutes?) at the beginning of an outreach call, to use that to set some context.

- Be aware of time zones / personal preferences. Some members prefer you to text them before calling, others prefer to just receive a call. Most people will state their preferences and time zone when giving out their number, but it never hurts to check.
- It's usually a good idea to ask whether someone is open to feedback or advice before giving either. Maybe the person just wanted to share and be heard. "Would you prefer I just listen, or would you prefer I give feedback?" / "Are you open to hearing how your share resonates with me?" or similar questions can be useful. Respect the other person's choice.
- Ending a call or even interrupting someone because you have to go is not rude as long as you do it kindly, it's an important aspect of you recognizing and honouring your own boundaries and time limitations.
- If you ask for outreach through a public channel like the WhatsApp group, it's courteous to follow up when you got onto someone so people know you're good – a quick "Found someone! Thanks!" or something similar is good enough.

Setting and respecting each other's boundaries

Most often outreach calls are great, useful, supporting experiences for both parties. If you ever do find yourself uncomfortable, please take care of your own needs. That includes the following things:

- Politely stating your own boundaries and sticking to them is not rude, selfish, or unfriendly – on the contrary. Taking care of your own needs is an important part of building a fellowship where everyone, including you, feels safe and welcome.
- You are welcome to end a call (even if that means you have to interrupt the other person), whenever you need to. "I'm so glad you called, and I need to wrap up this conversation now" is a fine way to do that. Clearly stating how much time you have at the beginning of the call can help with this.
- You are not required to continue having outreach calls with someone when you'd prefer not to, or when you feel that the outreach is affecting your recovery in a negative way.
- Respect the privacy of the other person because it creates a safe space for sharing. For example, don't ask about identifying details that are not relevant to the call, and be aware of not accidentally maneuvering the other person into a position where they feel pressured to reveal personal details.
- Gravitate towards people who help your recovery along. Over time, associate with people who have what you want, or are working on those issues.
- ACA is meant to be a safe space for all, which discourages using it as a dating ground. It is a space to find support in recovery, treating it as a place to find potential partners is inappropriate. Flirtatious language can make people uncomfortable. If you feel like someone is crossing a boundary there, you have every right to shut that down and ask for support from other members.

It's okay to decline an outreach call (there could be a variety of reasons why both parties might turn down a request):

- Prior commitment at the time preferred by the initiator/receiver
- They have too much on their plate currently
- They may have limited time to speak to their sponsees or fellow travellers
- Lack of time or mutually convenient time windows

- The member is going through something in their own recovery journey and can't support others at that time

Try not to take it personally when someone doesn't pick up or ends a call earlier than you had hoped. They are just trying to take care of their own needs – thank them for communicating their boundaries clearly. If the first person doesn't pick up, simply try someone else. Over time, gravitate towards the people you can rely on.

Outreach calls can be a powerful aspect of working your recovery. Again, there is no “right or wrong” way to do an outreach call. Simply make a couple and figure it out over time.