

Helpline Volunteer Handbook



Welcome

Thank you for volunteering to answer calls on the AA Australia 1300 Helpline.

For many callers, this may be their first contact with Alcoholics Anonymous. Reaching out for help can be a difficult and sometimes frightening step, and a simple conversation with a caring AA member can make a real difference.

You do not need special qualifications to answer helpline calls. You do not need to be a counsellor, therapist or expert on alcoholism. What matters most is a willingness to listen, to share your experience where appropriate, and to help connect people with Alcoholics Anonymous.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance and practical information to help you feel confident in your role as a helpline volunteer. It outlines the principles of helpline service, common situations you may encounter, and the processes used to support callers while protecting their privacy and your anonymity.

Thank you for being of service and helping to ensure that, whenever someone reaches out for help, the hand of AA is there.

Why Does the Helpline Exist?

The AA Australia 1300 Helpline exists to help people connect with Alcoholics Anonymous and the support available through the Fellowship.

People contact AA for many different reasons. Some are looking for help with their drinking. Others may be searching for a meeting, seeking information about AA, or looking for support for a family member or friend. You may also receive calls from health professionals, treatment providers and members of the wider community wanting to learn more about AA.

Whatever the reason for the call, the purpose of the helpline is to provide a welcoming first point of contact and help people find the information, meetings and support they are seeking.

As helpline volunteers, we are not expected to solve people's problems or provide professional advice. Our role is simply to listen, share our experience where appropriate, and help connect people with Alcoholics Anonymous. In many cases, a single conversation can be the first step on someone's journey to recovery.

The Role of a Helpline Volunteer

As a helpline volunteer, you are often the first point of contact between a caller and Alcoholics Anonymous. The way you respond can help create a positive first impression of AA and may encourage someone to take the next step towards recovery.

Your role is to listen, share your experience where appropriate, provide information about AA, help callers find meetings and resources, and arrange follow-up when requested and available. In many cases, simply listening with understanding and sharing hope can be enough to help a caller feel less alone.

Many people are nervous when they first contact AA. Some may have been thinking about calling for a long time, while others may not be entirely sure why they called. A calm, patient and friendly conversation can help put them at ease and create an opportunity for them to learn more about AA.

Remember that you are not expected to have all the answers. Your role is not to solve the caller's problems, but to help connect them with the support, experience and fellowship that Alcoholics Anonymous can offer.

What We Do Not Do

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with one another. Helpline volunteers carry the AA message by sharing their own experience of recovery and helping callers connect with AA.



It is important to remember that the AA Helpline is not a professional counselling or advice service. While callers may discuss a wide range of personal issues, our role is not to provide professional guidance or solve their problems.

As helpline volunteers:

- We do not provide counselling or therapy.
- We do not diagnose alcoholism or any other condition.
- We do not provide medical advice.
- We do not provide legal advice.
- We do not provide financial advice.
- We do not tell people how to live their lives or what decisions they should make.

Instead, we listen, share our experience where appropriate, and help callers learn about Alcoholics Anonymous and the support available through the Fellowship.

When a caller needs assistance beyond the scope of AA, we can provide information about appropriate support services and encourage them to seek professional help where needed.

Understanding the People Who Call

People contact the AA Helpline for many different reasons, and every caller will have their own story, concerns and expectations.

Some callers may be looking for help with their own drinking. Others may be family members or friends affected by someone else's drinking and looking for information or support. You may also receive calls from existing AA members, treatment providers, health professionals, students, journalists or members of the wider community wanting to learn more about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Callers may arrive feeling hopeful and ready to take action, or they may be frightened, frustrated, emotional, confused or unsure about what they need. Some may have been thinking about calling for a long time before finally reaching out.

Whatever the circumstances, try to approach every caller with patience, kindness and respect. A welcoming and understanding response can help create a positive first experience of AA and may encourage someone to take the next step towards recovery.

Listening

One of the most important skills a helpline volunteer can develop is the ability to listen. Many callers contact AA because they need someone who understands what they are going through and is willing to hear their story without judgement.

Allow callers time to explain why they have called and try not to interrupt or rush the conversation. It can be tempting to offer solutions or share your own experience too quickly, but often the most helpful thing you can do is simply listen.

By listening carefully, you can better understand the caller's situation and respond to their needs. Many callers are not looking for answers straight away—they are looking for understanding, reassurance and hope.

Remember that listening is an important part of carrying the AA message. A caller who feels heard and respected is more likely to leave the conversation with a positive impression of Alcoholics Anonymous and a willingness to take the next step.

Sharing Your Experience

Alcoholics Anonymous is built on one alcoholic helping another through the sharing of experience, strength and hope. One of the most valuable things you can offer a caller is your own experience of recovery.



Where appropriate, you may wish to share a little of your story, particularly if it helps the caller relate to AA or understand that recovery is possible. Try to keep your sharing simple and relevant to the conversation. Many members find it helpful to focus on what their drinking was like, what happened, and what life is like now.

Avoid lengthy personal stories or turning the conversation into an opportunity to talk about yourself. The focus should remain on the caller and their needs. Your experience is most helpful when it reassures the caller that they are not alone and that there is hope for a different way of life through Alcoholics Anonymous.

Helping People Find Meetings

One of the most common reasons people contact AA is to find a meeting. For many callers, attending a meeting will be the next important step in their recovery journey.

It is common for newcomers to have questions about what happens at a meeting. They may wonder whether they will be expected to speak, whether they can simply listen, or whether other people will understand what they are going through. Many people feel nervous or uncertain before attending their first meeting.

A reassuring conversation can help ease these concerns. Let callers know that they are welcome, that they are not alone, and that many AA members felt exactly the same way before attending their first meeting. Explain that there is no requirement to speak and that newcomers are welcome to simply listen and learn more about AA.

Volunteers should be familiar with the AA Meetings website at meetings.aa.org.au and other approved AA resources so they can help callers find suitable meetings and answer common questions with confidence.



Common Situations

Someone Looking for Help

Many callers will contact AA because they are worried about their drinking or are looking for a way to stop. They may be nervous, unsure what to say, or uncertain whether AA is right for them.

The most important thing you can do is listen. Allow the caller to explain why they have called and try not to rush the conversation.

Explain what AA is and how it works, and where appropriate, share a little of your own experience. Keep it simple and focus on what helped you.

Provide information about meetings and reassure callers that they are welcome. Many people feel anxious about attending their first meeting, and it can help to explain that they can simply listen if they wish.

Remember that your role is to offer hope, not persuasion. We do not try to convince people that they are alcoholic or that they must attend AA. We simply share our experience and help them decide whether AA might be helpful to them.

Family Members and Friends

Many callers will be family members or friends who are concerned about someone else's drinking. They may feel worried, frustrated, frightened or unsure of what to do next.

Listen to their concerns and explain what Alcoholics Anonymous is and how it helps people who want to stop drinking. While AA is designed for the alcoholic, family members and friends can also benefit from support.

Where appropriate, provide information about Al-Anon, a fellowship that supports people affected by someone else's drinking. Many family members find comfort in speaking with others who have faced similar challenges.

Someone Who Has Been Drinking

It is not uncommon for people to call AA while they are drinking or shortly afterwards. Some callers may be emotional, confused or struggling to express themselves clearly.

Remain calm, patient and respectful. Avoid arguing with the caller or trying to convince them of anything. Instead, listen to what they have to say and provide information about AA where appropriate.

Even if the caller does not seem ready for recovery today, a positive conversation may encourage them to reach out again in the future. Where appropriate, encourage them to attend a meeting or call back when they feel ready to take the next step.

Someone Who Is Distressed

Some callers may be upset, emotional or overwhelmed when they contact AA. They may be experiencing difficulties in their drinking, relationships, health or personal circumstances.

Listen patiently and allow the caller time to express what they are feeling. Remain calm and supportive, even if the conversation is emotional.



Remember that your role is not to provide counselling or solve the caller's problems. Instead, focus on sharing hope, explaining how AA can help, and helping the caller connect with meetings and other appropriate sources of support.

Aggressive or Abusive Callers

Sometimes a caller may become angry, abusive or threatening. This can happen for a variety of reasons and is not necessarily a reflection on you or your service.

Remain calm and polite, and avoid arguing or responding emotionally. In many cases, allowing the caller to speak and responding respectfully may help de-escalate the situation.

However, helpline volunteers are not expected to tolerate abuse. If a caller continues to be abusive, threatening or inappropriate after being asked to stop, it is acceptable to politely end the conversation.

Your safety and wellbeing are important. If a call leaves you feeling unsettled, consider discussing it with your coordinator or another trusted volunteer while maintaining the caller's confidentiality.

Crisis Situations

AA is not an emergency service. However, from time to time a caller may appear to be at immediate risk of harming themselves or others, or may be experiencing a serious medical or mental health crisis.

If this occurs, remain calm and compassionate. Listen carefully and avoid making promises that you may not be able to keep. Encourage the caller to seek immediate professional assistance.

Useful contacts include:

Emergency Services – 000

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467

In some situations, the caller may be unwilling or unable to seek help themselves. If you have reason to believe that a caller is in immediate danger and requires urgent assistance, you may need to involve emergency services.

You will receive specific training on how to do this using the helpline platform. If you are ever unsure, seek assistance from a coordinator or another experienced volunteer.

Remember that your role is not to manage a crisis alone. Your role is to remain calm, provide support, and help connect the caller with the professional assistance they may need. [LINK TO INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO TRANSFER A CALL TO 000.](#)

Privacy and Confidentiality

People who contact AA trust us with personal information, and it is important that we handle that information responsibly.

In most cases, you will not need to collect any personal information from a caller. However, there may be times when a caller requests follow-up or asks to be contacted by a local AA member. In these situations, collect only the information that is necessary to arrange the requested service.

As a general rule, collect the minimum amount of information required and avoid making detailed notes about the caller or their circumstances. Information provided by callers should be treated as confidential and only shared with those who need it to carry out the requested follow-up.

Caller information should never be stored in personal notebooks, mobile phones, address books or contact lists. Approved systems and processes should always be used when passing information to other volunteers.



The helpline system is designed to protect the privacy of both callers and volunteers. A volunteer's personal phone number is not visible to callers or to other volunteers using the system. Volunteers are strongly discouraged from sharing their personal contact details directly with callers. Where follow-up is required, approved processes should be used so that privacy and anonymity are maintained for everyone involved.

It is also important to remember that information about other helpline volunteers is confidential. Personal contact details, rosters and other volunteer information should not be shared without the person's knowledge and consent.

Protecting privacy helps maintain trust in both the helpline and Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

Arranging a Follow-Up

Sometimes a caller may ask to be contacted by a local AA member or may want support attending their first meeting. In these situations, it may be appropriate to arrange a follow-up.

Before collecting any information, explain why it is needed and make sure the caller agrees. Because caller phone numbers are not visible within the helpline system, you will need to ask the caller for their contact details if they would like someone to contact them.

In most cases, only a first name, phone number and general location will be required. Collect only the information that is necessary to arrange the follow-up and avoid recording unnecessary personal details.

Once the information has been collected, use the approved process to pass it to the appropriate volunteer or service contact. Information should only be shared with those who need it to carry out the follow-up request.

Many callers are nervous about attending their first meeting or speaking with another AA member. A simple follow-up call from a local member can often provide reassurance, answer questions and help the caller take the next step towards recovery.



Practical Service Information

If You Cannot Cover Your Shift

Helpline volunteers play an important role in ensuring that calls are answered when people reach out for help. If you are unable to cover a scheduled shift, notify the appropriate coordinator as soon as possible and follow your local roster procedures. The more notice you can provide, the easier it will be to arrange alternative coverage.

Technical Problems

If you experience problems with the helpline platform, such as difficulty logging in, receiving calls, using the chat function or accessing other features, seek assistance from your coordinator or the appropriate support contact. Do not assume that someone else has already reported the issue.

Questions During a Shift

No volunteer is expected to know everything. If you are unsure how to handle a call or need assistance, use the internal chat function to seek guidance from another volunteer or coordinator. Helpline service is a team effort, and support is available when you need it.

Taking a Break from Service

There may be times when work, family commitments, health concerns or your own recovery need to take priority. If you need to step back from helpline service for a period of time, speak with your coordinator so that suitable arrangements can be made. Looking after your own wellbeing is an important part of being of service.

Updating Your Details

If your contact details change, or if there are changes to your availability for service, please notify your coordinator as soon as possible. Keeping volunteer records up to date helps ensure smooth communication and effective rostering.

Referring within AA

From time to time, callers may have questions that fall outside the scope of the helpline volunteer role. These may include enquiries about literature purchases, correctional facilities, treatment and rehabilitation services, professional referrals, safeguarding concerns, media enquiries, research requests, or other specialised areas of AA service.

Helpline volunteers are not expected to be experts in all areas of AA service. If you are unsure how to assist, or if the enquiry requires specialist knowledge or follow-up, refer the caller to the General Service Office (GSO).

Phone: 02 9599 8866

Email: gso@aa.org.au

The GSO can provide information, direct enquiries to the appropriate service contact, and assist with matters that fall outside the scope of the helpline.



Using the Helpline System

The helpline system allows volunteers across Australia to answer calls and work together. You do not need to be highly technical to use the system. You will receive practical training before answering calls independently.

The main features you are likely to use are:

- Logging in and out.
- Answering calls.
- Using the internal chat function.
- Arranging follow-up requests.

Remember that the most important part of the helpline remains the conversation between one alcoholic and another. [LINK TO THE SYSTEM GUIDE](#)

Using Internal Chat

The internal chat function allows helpline volunteers across Australia to communicate with one another while on shift. It is an important tool for sharing information, seeking assistance and arranging follow-up for callers.

You may use chat to request local follow-up, seek assistance from another volunteer, pass on information needed to arrange a follow-up call, or ask questions during your shift. For example, a volunteer in one part of the country may answer a call from someone seeking contact with a local AA member in another region. The chat function allows that information to be passed quickly and securely to the appropriate volunteer.

Only share information that is necessary to carry out the task. Information shared through chat should be treated as confidential and only used for the purpose for which it was provided.

Remember that the chat function is a service tool. Conversations should remain respectful, professional and focused on supporting callers and carrying the AA message.

Looking After Yourself

Helpline service can be a rewarding way to carry the AA message, but some calls may also be emotionally challenging. From time to time, you may speak with people who are distressed, experiencing difficult circumstances, or facing serious consequences from their drinking.

It is important to remember that you are not responsible for solving the caller's problems. Your role is to listen, share your experience where appropriate, and help connect the caller with Alcoholics Anonymous and other appropriate sources of support.

If a call has affected you, it can be helpful to talk with another trusted member, your helpline coordinator, your sponsor, or another appropriate support person. When doing so, take care to maintain the caller's confidentiality and avoid sharing unnecessary personal information.

Remember that helpline service is a team effort. Support is available, and you do not have to carry difficult situations on your own.



Final Thoughts

For many people, the AA helpline is their first contact with Alcoholics Anonymous. A simple conversation can help someone find a meeting, connect with another member, or discover that recovery from alcoholism is possible.

You do not need to have all the answers, and you do not need to be perfect. The most important things you can bring to this service are a willingness to listen, kindness, patience and your own experience of recovery.

Remember that every call is an opportunity to carry the AA message. Sometimes the smallest act of service can have a lasting impact on someone's life.

Thank you for your service.

Additional Resources:

- Helpline Volunteer Handbook [\(LINK?\)](#)
- 1300 Helpline Volunteer Quick Reference Guide [\(LINK?\)](#)
- Quick Reference Guide short video [\(LINK?\)](#)
- 1300 Helpline Platform User Guide [\(LINK?\)](#)
- Platform User Guide short video [\(LINK?\)](#)