

# **H&I New Member Handout**

## **Orientation**

H&I orientation is a period that allows NA members to become familiar with H&I work so they are not rushed into it without any preparation for this service. Many people are quite apprehensive about getting into H&I for a variety of reasons. Do not be put off everyone has something to offer.

This packet has been compiled by the Oahu Area H&I Subcommittee to give a brief outline of some of the specifics that will be important for you as a panel member. The H&I Handbook gives a much more in-depth look at H&I work in Narcotics Anonymous if you decide you want to learn more about this rewarding type of service.

Many areas as part of orientation bring those that are new to H&I to their first H&I meeting/presentation as an observer. This will give you a chance to just listen at first and see how H&I meetings/presentations really work. In addition, this helps many feel more comfortable when they come join the panel.

## **Introduction to H&I**

Many NA members have found Hospitals & Institutions service to be an important part of their personal recovery. Our members who actively participate in H&I service are some of the greatest resources available in the fellowship. A commitment to H&I service is one of the many ways to get involved with the NA service structure and begin to feel a part of the fellowship.

We know that addiction leads to “jails, institutions, and death” and that NA’s primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. It is not surprising then, that carrying the message into hospitals and institutions is one of our priorities. NA members have consistently supported this belief by forming Hospitals & Institution subcommittees around the world. It is through these meetings that 47% (1998-99) of the members of our fellowship were introduced to this new way of life.

Still, some NA members have been reluctant to become involved in H&I service because they have never spent time in an institution or a hospital. With our personal experience we are uniquely qualified to carry our message of recovery, and with the proper preparation, we can do so in H&I.

The purpose of an orientation is to inform new members of the H&I subcommittee how to conduct themselves at an H&I meeting or presentation.

## **The Purpose of an H&I Meeting**

The purpose of an H&I meeting is to carry the NA message of recovery to addicts who do not have full access to regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings. H&I meetings/presentations, except for those in longer-term facilities, are intended to simply introduce those attending to some of the basics of the NA program.

In order to form a clear understanding of an H&I meeting or presentation, it is important to know where it fits in our service structure. Rather than being an NA Group, which may be represented at the Area Service Committee by a GSR, an H&I meeting/presentation is a service provided by the Area Service Committee through its H&I subcommittee. These meetings take place in hospitals, treatment centers, correctional facilities, and adolescent institutions. Rather than being an NA Group, an H&I meeting is always held under the direction of an H&I subcommittee.

All H&I meetings/presentations are closed to outside participation. NA members from the outside should attend the H&I meeting only when invited by the Panel Coordinator or the Panel Leader.

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The initial approach to start an H&I meeting/presentation should be made through an H&I subcommittee: NEVER ACT ALONE. Often a facility will approach Narcotics Anonymous and ask to have an H&I meeting/presentation. In either case, the H&I subcommittee should work in conjunction with the P.I. subcommittee.

Many addicts are introduced to Narcotics Anonymous through our H&I meetings/presentations, so remember, “Maybe you didn’t die because of H&I” and get involved. The addict who still suffers needs you.

### **Why Should I Get Involved?**

H&I offers us the opportunity to show our gratitude; to be responsible; and to learn to share the NA message with no strings attached. For those of us involved, H&I service is seen as an effective tool that helps us stay clean and keep coming back.

The H&I message is no different than the NA message: That an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. The most important gift we can share is that there is hope and freedom from active addiction in Narcotics Anonymous. Any NA member who wants to carry this message is encouraged to look into service through H&I. There are many ways to serve NA, but many of us have found H&I service to be the most rewarding part of our recovery.

### **Why Do We Need an Orientation?**

An H&I meeting provides the first exposure to recovery in Narcotics Anonymous for many addicts, so it is imperative that we carry a clear and consistent message of Narcotics Anonymous recovery and project a positive image of the fellowship. This also applies to how we handle the facility administration. In order to keep any difficulties to a minimum, we must take care to maintain regular and consistent contact between the facility and the subcommittee.

Once these steps have been taken and the H&I meeting/presentation is being held regularly in that facility, it is important to keep the channels of communication open. Anyone involved in H&I should be familiar with H&I policies as outlined throughout the WSC H&I Handbook. Orientation sessions for the new H&I volunteers should be used to accomplish this.

It is very important to remember that when you attend an H&I meeting/presentation that you are PERCEIVED as a representative of Narcotics Anonymous. The fellowship as a whole may be judged on how you conduct yourself so common courtesy is essential.

We should make it clear from our earliest contact with the facility staff (as well as in a meeting with clients) that we have NO opinions on treatment methods or ANY issues other than recovery from addiction through the application of the program of Narcotics Anonymous.

It is important that Narcotics Anonymous and our H&I service efforts remain clearly separate from any facility in which we provide services. Efforts must be made to ensure that this is understood by the facility, the residents, and the H&I members. The principles of NA are often quite different from or even conflict with the principles taught by the treatment centers and other fellowships the residents may be required to attend. This often causes confusion among the residents. Nowhere is it more apparent than in the language used in meetings.

We need to be consistent with our Traditions while providing H&I service. If a member who is doing H&I work does not clearly understand that NA has no opinion on treatment methods these issues must be addressed directly with that member.

A question and answer session can be included somewhere toward the end of the meeting/presentation regardless of the format you use. When answering questions it is important to

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remember that NA has no opinion on outside issues. Often, the residents want to discuss issues that do not pertain to NA. Do not be drawn into these types of discussions. Don't hesitate to say, "I'm sorry, I have no experience I can share with you on that subject." Even if you do have personal experience, it is important to remain consistent with the Tenth Tradition and not discuss it in this setting. Always remember to share only your experience, strength and hope about your recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

### **Who Can Share? H&I Requirements**

Who is best suited to carry the Narcotics Anonymous message in Hospitals & Institutions meeting? In our experience, it is best for a member to have three months clean before attending an H&I meeting/presentation and six months clean before speaking at one.

It is not important whether or not we have been in a similar facility ourselves. Anyone with a clear and consistent Narcotics Anonymous message who is willing to share is well suited to do H&I work.

Many people are at least a little apprehensive about sharing in a prison, treatment facility, or mental health setting. You might feel intimidated or vulnerable. If you have never spent time in one of these institutions, you may feel that you have nothing to offer. We understand that and can offer the reassurance that the only thing that really matters is whether you are willing to carry a message of recovery in NA.

Those of us in active H&I service work find it not only interesting, but also intensely rewarding, and it is a major part of our own personal recovery. Gratitude and enthusiasm have replaced our initial fears.

To watch the eyes of someone who is hearing the NA message for the first time slowly come to life, to hear that person begin to ask questions, to see that first glimmer of hope that there is a way out, and to later witness that person receiving a key tag on the outside, these experiences await us all.

A large majority of the facilities where our H&I subcommittees provide an H&I meeting/presentation have other Twelve Step fellowships providing H&I meetings as well. Clients and/or inmates will hear a variety of recovery messages specific to the individual fellowships primary purpose. Other Twelve Step fellowships do not need our assistance in carrying their message. References to other fellowships or their literature, while using language associated with a different fellowship may lead one to believe that the only way an addict can recover is to attend meetings of all Twelve-Step fellowships. As a fellowship, we need to allow the addicts we come into contact with the opportunity to choose for themselves which fellowship is best suited for them.

Any fellowship utilizing Twelve Step recovery has a set of Traditions. Each has their primary purpose. The fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, as directed by our Fifth Tradition, has one purpose, "Our purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers."

### **Purpose of an Area H&I Subcommittee**

The Area H&I subcommittee plays a central role in the overall H&I service effort. It initiates coordinates and conducts all local NA Hospital and Institution meetings and activities within the area. This subcommittee is the hub of H&I planning and organization.

The Area H&I committee is a Subcommittee of the Area Service Committee (ASC). It meets regularly, and its Chair reports to and is accountable in all matters to the ASC. The Subcommittee is composed of an H&I Chairperson and an H&I Vice-Chairperson, as well as any other members of the fellowship who wish to be involved. Here is what the subcommittee does:

- Provides a monthly forum to pool experiences. "I can't – we can."

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- Prepares H&I policies and guidelines for the H&I subcommittee and the ASC's approval.
- Serves as a communication link between local H&I meetings/presentations and H&I sub-committees at the regional and world levels.
- Selects the members who are to conduct the H&I meetings.
- Serves as a distribution point for literature for the meetings and reports these transactions to the ASC.
- In cooperation with Public Information, makes all initial contact with facilities.
- Conducts learning days, workshops, and orientations on relevant topics.
- Is responsible for all H&I oriented services within the Area.

### The Meeting/Presentation Format

There are a variety of formats that we use when carrying the message into facilities, but there are some key points to keep in mind about all of them.

The format of any particular H&I meeting/presentation may vary from meeting to meeting depending on the type of facility. In short-term facilities, the format will be more focused on the panel members carrying a message into the residents, while at a long-term facility we may encourage more participation from the residents. In H&I we are carrying the message into the facility. At an H&I meeting we are not there to dump our problems, but rather to help these addicts become aware of what NA is and how it works in our lives. In effect, an H&I meeting is an introduction to our fellowship for addicts.

The panel leader should let you know what the format is before the meeting/presentation and should be able to answer any questions you may have about it. If you would like to see samples of a variety of formats, there is an explanation of several of them in the *WSC H&I Handbook*.

Whatever format is chosen, we normally get the residents involved with a question and answer session at some point in the meeting/presentation. Also, you may be asked to stay after the meeting for a while to talk with the residents if that is allowed.

### Personal Commitments

Please DO NOT volunteer for an H&I meeting/presentation if:

1. You are not sure that you want to attend, or
2. You are not sure you will be able to attend the meeting. If something comes up and you will be unable to make it, try to give the panel leader at least forty-eight hours notice so that he/she can invite someone to fill your spot. DO NOT ask someone to take your place or even to come along with you to the meeting. The panel leader is the only one that is allowed to invite people to the meeting.

H&I is an important area of service work. It affects the fellowship in either a positive or negative light, so it is important to consider our qualifications, motives, and commitments for carrying the message into facilities prior to becoming active in H&I service work.

A personal commitment is a responsibility; willingness shared through the H&I subcommittee by each member, and a dedication to be a part of service in carrying the message of recovery to the still suffering addict. It is a privilege for us to share our experience, strength, and hope in order to be able to give back what was so freely given to us.

Being consistent with our commitment, we need to consider our responsibilities.

### Commitment to the Language of Recovery

Commitment to the language of recovery in our meetings is also an important issue. In order to

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remain consistent with our Traditions, and to insure that the message we carry is a clear consistent message of recovery in NA, we refer to ourselves simply as “addicts”, not “drug addicts”, not “addicts and alcoholics”, not “dually addicted”, not “junkies”, not “dope fiends”, just as “addicts!” We refer to our time in the program as “clean,” “clean-time,” or “recovery.” A mixed message is a confusing message. If this is something that you feel you cannot do, then maybe you are not suited for H&I service in NA.

### Questions and Answers

This is a good idea to encourage questions concerning what was presented at the meeting or other general questions about NA, but there are a few things you should keep in mind.

Please remember that NA has no opinion on outside issues. Occasionally during the question and answer period or when talking after the meeting/presentation, the residents will ask us to give an opinion on outside issues such as:

1. Other recovery programs or fellowships.
2. The facility, i.e., “Do I need to stay in treatment?”
3. Many other issues that do not pertain to recovery from addiction in the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship.

### Commonly Asked Questions

Q. I don't know if I'm an addict?

A. Suggest reading the I.P. titled “Am I an addict?” If you feel your life has become unmanageable and you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, and want to find a new way of life, you may want to try NA.

Q. I'm just an alcoholic. Can I go to NA?

A. Alcohol is a drug, and NA treats the disease of addiction. If you have a desire to stop using, you fit the requirements.

Q. Will you be my sponsor?

A. Explain the way addicts get a sponsor at a meeting and refer them to the “Sponsorship” I.P.

Q. Can I have your phone number?

A. Explain how they can get phone numbers at meetings. Tell them that if you see them at a meeting, you will be glad to introduce them to other addicts and also give them your phone number at that time.

Q. I'm an addict and an alcoholic but I drank more than I did drugs. Should I go to AA or NA?

A. Same answer as question number two, adding that we have no opinions of other programs.

Q. What should I do when I leave here – go to a halfway house or go home?

A. NA has no opinions on any issues other than those relating to NA. We do suggest that you go to a meeting the day you leave the facility.

Q. I still feel sick after two weeks. How long before I'm not sick anymore?

A. We are not doctors only addicts like yourself, and we can only share how it was for us.

Q. While I am here I am allowed to go to outside meetings. Can you take me to a meeting?

A. Refer them to the NA helpline number.

Other questions clients of facilities may ask are:

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Is (name of facility) a good detox/treatment/secondary?

They don't let us go to outside meetings. Don't you think that is unfair?

Why do we get so many AA meetings here and so few NA?

It is very important that we are not drawn into these types of discussion! Always remember to only share your experience, strength, and hope about YOUR recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

### **Working with Others: Men with Men, Women with Women**

Some facilities house only men or only women. Other facilities house both men and women, but keep them separate. In these facilities, where your meetings/presentations will consist of only men or only women, we feel strongly that only same-sex Narcotics Anonymous members should participate. Remember, our primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery, not to make our meetings more popular with the addicts we are trying to help. Problems that arise in this area have the potential to seriously damage the credibility of Narcotics Anonymous. Experience has taught us that we can avoid these problems if we follow this simple guideline.

### **Adolescents**

When adolescents are referred to in this handbook, we are referring to anyone under the legal age of majority in your state or country. We need to remember that adolescents are prospective members and should be treated with respect. When sharing in an H&I meeting/presentation, we need to remember that to an adolescent, the stress experienced due to peer pressure or the relationship with their parents and/or teachers may be just as much a crisis to them as losing a job, marriage, or house may be to others. In NA, we learn to deal with our feelings and emotions, and share with others how we have been able to work through them by utilizing the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.

Due to the government statutes regarding adolescents, we need to be especially aware of facilities' rules and regulations as they relate to our interaction with these prospective members. For example, some facilities may require a staff member to be present during meetings/presentations. One suggestion we may make to administrators of facilities for adolescents is that they make attendance at the H&I meeting voluntary. We have found this reduces distraction, increasing the opportunity for recovery in the Narcotics Anonymous fellowship.

While some people maintain that adolescents respond better to people closer to their own age, the bulk of our experience suggests that the age of the person sharing at an adolescent H&I meeting is secondary to their ability to share a strong, clear message of recovery. Adolescents seem to respond more to the message than to the messenger. All H&I meetings are highly structured and should be geared towards recovery through the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Our experience has shown that we do not need to use a special format when carrying the message to adolescents.

In addition to the do's and don'ts found at the end of the WSC H&I Handbook, we feel the following should be included.

#### **DO's**

- Do** Remember that this is a "we" program. No addict should feel that he/she is being preached to.
- Do** Remember that an addict is an addict, regardless of age.
- Do** Tell them that there is fun in recovery, i.e., social events, fellowship, etc.
- Do** Acknowledge and validate their feelings and emotions.

#### **DON'TS**

- Don't** Glorify your past

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**Don't** Say, "I feel like I'm talking to my kids."

**Don't** Compare your bottom to theirs.

**Don't** Patronize adolescents.

**Don't** Use profanity.

### H&I Requirements

You have been invited to carry the message of recovery through H&I meetings/presentations because:

1. You have at least six months abstinence from all drugs.
2. You have a strong NA message of recovery from addiction.
3. You seem willing to comply with all of the H&I subcommittee's and the facility's requirements.
4. You are willing to carry the message in a responsible way.

### DO's and DON'TS for H&I Participation

#### DO's

**Do** Make directories of outside meetings available to residents.

**Do** Clarify the facility's rules with anyone you bring in.

**Do** Start and end on time!

**Do** Briefly explain what H&I is.

**Do** Make it clear that NA is separate and distinct from the facility as well as other fellowships.

**Do** Try to get residents involved, especially those in long-term facilities (ie., literature person, coffee maker, readings, etc.)

**Do** Obey all dress codes. Exercise common sense and dress appropriately.

**Do** Keep staff aware of your whereabouts at all times.

**Do** Stamp all literature you bring into a facility with the local helpline number.

**Do** Screen all panel members carefully, especially regarding the clean time or other requirements.

#### DON'TS

**Don't** Break another person's anonymity, or tell his or her story.

**Don't** Debate any issue involving facility rules or regulations.

**Don't** Get involved in discussions on outside issues; remember why we are there.

**Don't** While sharing, put too much focus on what it was like. They already know.

**Don't** Debate which drugs are acceptable. NA is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs.

**Don't** Discuss conditions within the facility, or opinions about staff members.

**Don't** Carry excessive cash, or wear expensive or flashy jewelry.

**Don't** Show favoritism to any resident(s).

**Don't** Take messages in or out of the facility.

**Don't** Give out any other person's address or phone number.

**Don't** Carry in any contraband items, such as cigarettes (if applicable) or weapons.

Remember at all times that you have a responsibility to the facility, to the residents, and to NA. If you observe the above suggestions, and follow the Twelve Traditions, you will uphold your responsibilities to all three.

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### **Commitment to Represent NA**

As H&I volunteers we must remember that when we attend an H&I meeting/presentation we are viewed as examples or representatives of NA. The fellowship as a whole may be judged on how we conduct ourselves. Common courtesy is essential. Therefore, we should arrive to the facility early. We should start and end the meeting on time. We should respect the dress code of the facility as well as recommendations made in the WSC H&I Handbook. We should treat everyone we meet; staff, patients, inmates and guests, with respect. Our actions in these facilities will reflect on NA as a whole and will also carry a message of recovery.

/sd  
(July '00)