



What to Expect at your First Meeting

When you first walk in, you will see chairs set up in a circle, or in rows facing the front of the room where there may be a podium. You might also see a separate table where program literature is displayed; the brochures are free. There is nothing to sign up for, and you can sit wherever you'd like; there is no pre-arranged seating.

You may receive a warm welcome from complete strangers at the meeting – this is normal. The best meetings are those where new members are greeted and treated like the most important people in the room. As awkward as it might feel, such warm greetings are really helpful for newcomers who may be too nervous to introduce themselves or otherwise break the ice. People there know how it feels to be new, and they genuinely want to make it more comfortable for you.

When it appears the meeting is ready start, just take your seat. The person assigned to lead the meeting will typically read the preamble - an introductory statement about the program. Other readings, often passages from the meeting's basic textbook, are also read by the leader or others who've been requested to do so.

Near the beginning of the meeting, participants are asked to introduce themselves and their disease, i.e., "I'm Bob and I'm an alcoholic." This can be a little tricky depending on the meeting you are at. Essentially, if you have concluded that you are an alcoholic or addict, just follow the others' lead by stating, "I'm (your name), and I'm an alcoholic (if your are in an AA meeting) or addict (if you are in a meeting other than AA.) Without going into great detail, this is just better because if you are in a closed meeting, it is expected that you are recovering from the substance that meeting focuses on, (i.e. alcohol in AA, cocaine in CA, narcotics in NA.) If you have not yet decided that you are an alcoholic or addict, just state your name and that you "have a desire to stop drinking" (in AA) or "using" (in CA, NA, etc.) as that is the "only requirement for... membership." If you decide to share, it is best not to mention drugs other than those that are the focus of that specific type of meeting.

From there, if you are at a "speaker" meeting, a main speaker will share his or her "experience, strength, and hope." In a "discussion" meeting, those in attendance take turns sharing. Some discussion meetings have participants raise their hand if they want to share; other meetings have the leader call on people to share. Although it is highly recommended to do so, there is no obligation to share. If you are called upon to share and it feels too uncomfortable, you can just decline by stating something like: "I pass today, but thanks anyway."

Toward the end of the meeting, a basket will be passed around for donations which pay for such things as rent, literature, and coffee (if it is provided.) General practice is to place a dollar or two in the basket, but there is absolutely no obligation to do so.

Remember, it may be very uncomfortable at first; this is normal and expected. The more you attend, the more comfortable you will become!