



Alcoholics Victorious

a program of Christians in Recovery

Keys to Starting An Alcoholics Victorious Group

1. Don't Re-invent the Wheel

The new AV groups that have had the most success are those led by people who have had experience in other support groups, such as AA, NA, or similar 12 Step groups. While it is not required, we have found this type of experience to be most helpful. Look for other AV groups in your area by searching our online database: <http://alcoholicsvictorious.org/meetings/>

Consider contacting one of these groups and attend a meeting or two. Otherwise, we strongly recommend visiting other kinds of local self-help groups to get a feel for how they operate and what might work for your own group.

2. Think "Mutual-Help" From the Start

The new AV groups that succeed are not started by an individual, but rather by two or more people who share the vision for a Christ-centered alternative to secular support groups. Find others who share your interest by circulating an AV brochure along with your flyer. Invite them to "join with others to help start a Christ-centered self-help group." Include your first name, phone number, and any other relevant information. Make copies and post them at places you feel are appropriate, e.g., library, community center, clinic, or post office. Mail copies to key people whom you think would know others like yourself. You can also ask if the notice might be published in your local church bulletin and newspaper.

When you receive a response, discuss with the caller what their interests are and how an AV group can meet their needs. Ask if they would be willing to share the responsibilities of organizing a group for a specific period of time. Involve several people in the initial work of the first meeting. They will be a model for newcomers who will also learn to pitch in and help. This is what your self-help mutual aid group is all about: a cooperative effort.

Also, consider obtaining the assistance of any professionals who may be sensitive to your needs and willing to assist you in your efforts. Physicians, clergy, and social workers may be helpful in various ways such as providing meeting space and locating needed resources.

3. Find a Suitable Meeting Place and Time

Often you can obtain free meeting space at a local church, library, community center, hospital, or social service agency. Chairs should be arranged in a circle in order to avoid a lecture set-up.

If you anticipate a small group and feel comfortable with the idea, consider initial meetings in members' homes. Set a convenient day and specific time for people so they can easily remember the meeting; for instance, the first Tuesday of the month or every Wednesday evening.

4. Publicize and Run your First Public Meeting

To reach potential members, consider where they might go to seek help (doctor's offices, local church, local and state agencies, psychiatrist or psychologist office). Contact these professionals and ask if you can place some brochures in their offices or notices on their bulletin boards. Ask them to include your AV meeting information in their newsletters, emails and web sites. Post announcements in the community calendar section of your local newspaper, library or community center. The key is to get the word out.

The first meeting should be arranged so that there will be ample time for you and other core group members to describe your interest and work, while allowing others the opportunity to share their view of how they would like to see the group function. Identify common needs the group can address.

Although you do not want to overload you new arrivals with information, you do want to stress the seriousness of you intent and the necessity of their participation. Make plans for the next meeting and consider having an opportunity for people to talk and socialize informally after the meeting. If possible, provide beverages and a light snack after the meeting.

5. Future Meetings

For future meetings consider the following:

Purpose: Establish the purpose of the group. Is the purpose clear? Groups often focus upon providing emotional support, practical information, education, and sometimes advocacy. Set basic guidelines for the meetings to ensure that group discussions are confidential, non-judgmental, and informative.

Membership: Who can attend meetings and who cannot? Do you want membership limited to only alcoholics or will you include addicts? Will you have a support group meeting for the loved ones of your members? (Remember they need support too.) Will there be membership dues? If so, how much?

Meeting Format: How will the meeting be structured? How much time will be devoted to business affairs, discussion time, planning future meetings, and socializing? What topics will be selected? Can guest speakers be invited? If the group grows too large, consider breaking down into smaller sub-groups of 7 to 12.

Roles and Responsibilities: Continue to share and delegate the work and responsibilities in the group. No one person should have to shoulder it all. Who will be the phone contact for the group? Do you want officers? Consider additional roles members can play in making the group work effectively. In asking for volunteers, it is sometimes easier to first ask the group as a whole what they feel needs improvement. Ask those who make suggestions to help in addressing these needs.

Phone Network: Many groups encourage the exchange of telephone numbers and email addresses or an internal contact list to provide help to members between meetings. Ask your membership if they would like this arrangement.

Use of Professionals: Consider using professionals as advisors, pastors, consultants, or speakers to your groups, and as sources of continued referrals and information.

Projects: Always begin with small projects, then work your way up to more difficult tasks.

Final Thoughts

Stay in touch with the needs of your members. Periodically ask new members about their needs and how they and the group can meet them. Similarly, be sure to avoid the pitfall of core group members forming a clique. Remember, everyone participating is in recovery and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. No one individual is more important than anyone else.

Expect your group to experience "ups and downs" in terms of attendance and enthusiasm. It is natural and should be expected. You may want to consider joining or forming an informal coalition of association of leaders from the same or similar groups, for your own periodic mutual support and the sharing of program ideas and successes.



Learn more about Alcoholics Victorious
<http://alcoholicsvictorious.org>



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