

Chapter Ten: AA Telephone Services

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Our national Telephone Service operates throughout Great Britain using the telephone number
0800 917 7650

This number links the caller geographically to a local responder who will take incoming enquiries and where appropriate, pass details of the request for help on to a member who has been listed under local arrangements to carry out Twelfth Step work.

The National Helpline is intended for the use of the still suffering alcoholic.

The purpose of this guidance is to make officers aware of recommendations that may enhance helpline operation and provide safeguards to both callers and members.

Please check with your local intergroup/region for information on how the Telephone Service operates in your area.

10:1 Structure

Responsibility for telephone services begins with intergroups; however in some areas it has been agreed to devolve this responsibility to regions. Officers within the structure are intergroup Telephone Liaison Officer (TLO); region TLO; Telephone Committee and the GSB member with responsibility for Telephone Service.

10:2 Finance

Our Traditions of autonomy and self-support apply to all Helplines. Operation of the national system means that there are two sets of telephone accounts generated for each Helpline number. It has been agreed generally that “local” numbers (usually intergroups) will take responsibility for their account while *GSO* will meet payment for the national account. Expenses incurred by members participating in telephone service may be claimed from their intergroup.

10:3 Telephone Service and Twelfth Step Work

The main purpose of telephone services is to put the suffering alcoholic in touch with an individual contact or AA group. It is the responsibility of the members of the local group to carry out the necessary Twelfth Step work, to provide a welcome to the new members and to share their experience, strength and hope with them and to help them on the road to recovery.

The Hints and Suggestions card for 12th Steppers has been acknowledged for its simple and comprehensive guidance. Awareness of this card needs to be emphasised throughout the Fellowship.

A telephone service requires support and participation by the groups and members in its area, not only in a financial sense, but in every aspect of its existence. To ensure that this support is maintained it is essential that 12th Step contact lists are kept up to date.

Common sense with a regard to AA principles is of much more help in maintaining a telephone service than is the establishment of administrative procedures.

However, certain recommendations can be made from experiences of telephone services to date:

- Responders and 12th Steppers should be chosen with care and endorsed through an agreed intergroup procedure. A minimum of 12 months' continuous sobriety is ideal
- Landlines are strongly recommended for home-based telephone responding. If an intergroup allows the use of mobile telephones to permit AA members without a landline to participate in telephone service, these should only be used at home. The use of mobiles in other locations or on the move is not acceptable due to the possibility of poor reception, lack of privacy along with the threat to anonymity. Another problem that can occur is when the caller gets through to a responder on a mobile with a pre-recorded message (when phone is busy) that gives out the responders name and/or number. This confuses the caller and affects AA as a whole
- The Responder answering the call should remember the first time caller is nervous and may have been drinking, so the response should be positive and sympathetic. Calling the emergency services should be the last resort of responders if they are worried about a caller. Although such calls are very few in number it is recognised they can be distressing. Responders should be made aware that the caller should be encouraged to take the responsibility of calling the relevant service that may help them, i.e., Samaritans, Police, and NHS. However, where the life of the caller, or the lives of others, is apparently at risk, we should notify the appropriate authority of the emergency
- The Responder's role is to pass on the caller's details to a member on the 12th Step list. The Responder needs to keep the call brief and confined to taking the necessary particulars, so that the telephone is kept free for other callers
- Details of phone numbers of AA members, nominated by local groups, who are ready and willing to carry out Twelfth Step work should be to hand and listed on an area basis for speed of reference. Experience has shown that it is vital to consider appropriate genders when placing Twelfth Step calls. When making Twelfth Step visits, it is strongly recommended that more than one person should make such visits
- An up to date list of group meetings should be available for immediate reference
- Intergroup and regional officers' phone numbers, together with the Southern Service Office (SSO), the Northern Service Office (NSO), and the General Service Office (GSO) phone numbers, should be readily available to responders so that calls from the media or other agencies can be referred to the correct source. Other agencies and Al-Anon contact numbers should also be available
- Calls received from employers, doctors, social workers, newspapers, radio and TV should be passed to the relevant Service Office. Calls from national press, radio or television should be referred to the General Service Office in York so that a coordinated response can be made

Great care should be taken regarding the confidentiality of members' phone numbers. The information as to how an enquirer can be contacted is taken by the Responder and passed on to the member. It then becomes the responsibility of that member to take whatever action is appropriate. Responders should not give the caller an AA member's phone number under any circumstances.

(Revised 2015)