

Information regarding children & young people in meetings & sponsorship

The NSB has investigated within our limited availability (both time wise and resources) the frequently asked questions about children and young people in OA Meetings. Can they attend? Can they come on their own? Can they be sponsored? Would the sponsor need a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check first?

We have found it very hard to obtain definitive answers to all these questions and strongly suggest that you contact your local Police Head Quarters Criminal Records / Information Dept in your own area to find out what the current regulations are. We cannot stress this enough. Different areas of Great Britain may well have different regulations (e.g. Scotland, Wales).

The issue of OA members wishing to bring their own young babies or children to a meeting are not addressed here. This is a matter for each individual group conscience.

Young people aged 16 and 17 can apparently attend OA meetings without parental consent or knowledge and can enter into a sponsorship relationship without being chaperoned. However it would seem prudent to encourage them to tell their family that they were attending our meetings and what that entailed e.g. meeting with a sponsor.

For those aged 14 and 15 it has been suggested to us that they can attend OA meetings alone so long as their parent/guardian know they are attending. This is based on the various legislative documents which now allow children 14 years and over to make their own decisions. They can also be sponsored but a one to one situation like this would need 'special treatment'. This may involve a parent/guardian being present, having two sponsors, and meeting up initially with the parent/guardian. For the protection of all concerned, to have two OA members present at all times would seem prudent.

A child under 13 years must attend with a parent or guardian.

There is apparently no official requirement currently for OA members to have DBS checks. However due to the variation in maturity levels in people age 13 to 18, their vulnerabilities as young people and the lack of consistent advice for your own and OA's protection we suggest that OA members do not meet with young people under 18 on their own. Similarly it is wise to consider child protection issues before offering lifts home, hugging, and other personal boundaries concerns. In addition the group as a whole (if it has young people regularly attending) may need to consider the level and content of personal sharing contained within the meeting and whether it is suitable for a young person to hear.

First contact or 12th step calls. It has been recommended that when meeting a child/young person initially for a 12th step call, that two members meet with both the young person's parent /guardian and the young person to share their stories and about OA.

These notes are given by way of suggestions and are not intended to engender fear or to deter us from admitting minors to meetings. Nor are they intended in any way as legal advice. However the regulations regarding young people are not straightforward and we are sure that no OA member would wish to bring the reputation of OA as a whole into disrepute. Whilst the NSB is as keen as any member to carry our message to the still suffering we do believe our energies are better directed to those aged 18 and over.