

Safeguarding Policy Overeaters Anonymous (Great Britain) Ltd

CONTEXT

Overeaters Anonymous (Great Britain) is a registered charity (1059240) and a company limited by guarantee. It was incorporated in 1996. It is the National Service Board for Overeaters Anonymous (OA) in Great Britain.

The objectives of Overeaters Anonymous (Great Britain) Ltd (OAGB) as stated in their company memorandum and articles of association are:

- (a) To relieve sickness and preserve and protect the physical, mental and emotional health of people suffering from compulsive eating
- (b) To advance public education about compulsive overeating and methods of recovery.

OAGB is not a membership organisation. Our relationship to local OA groups and Intergroups of Great Britain is covered by our bylaws. In accordance with Tradition 4 of the OA Fellowship “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.”

This Safeguarding Policy is an opinion on an “outside issue”. This policy is adopted in order to comply with Charity Commission Guidance and our legal obligations as a limited company.

As a charity, we have a responsibility to ensure that safeguarding measures are in place for our staff, board members, volunteers and at any events that we organise.

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding is a function or activity that prevents harm or promotes the wellbeing of adults and children. These harms can be physical, sexual, emotional, financial or neglectful. They can include coercive or controlling behaviours.

As a 12 step Fellowship we believe that the whole ethos of OA is about reducing the harms our addiction to food and compulsive food behaviours engenders within us. We believe that by following the 12 steps, individuals obtain “a fuller living experience” (Our Invitation to You).

RECOVERY

As we progress through our individual journeys of recovery our awareness and action regarding our behaviours and thoughts develops. This may lead to realisations of current or past situations which were injurious to ourselves or others. Our fellowship recognises that there will be times where we need to seek outside guidance for ourselves in dealing with these situations.

“As with the fourth step inventory, the Tenth step inventory may uncover aspects of our past with which we need professional help. Our OA friends are sympathetic and loving, but few are trained to recognise and deal with deeply rooted psychological problems, and OA is not the place to seek such help” (OA 12 Steps & 12 Traditions, Step 10).

By following the twelve steps to aid recovery we believe that individuals will lead more fulfilled lives and find serenity and peace of mind.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

The only requirement for OA membership is the desire to stop eating compulsively (Tradition 2). We welcome everybody who wants to stop eating compulsively (OA Preamble). Whatever problem you may have with food, you are welcome at OA meetings, regardless of race, creed, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or any other trait (Suggested Meeting Format).

When first coming into the rooms of OA, members can be vulnerable because of the disease of compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviours. Our vulnerabilities can resurface at any point of our recovery journey. Our fellowship gives us much guidance on how to deal with these vulnerabilities for ourselves and fellow members and we would encourage you to read our literature.

In 2020 OAGB published guidance on Children and Young people in meetings and sponsorship. We advised all groups that membership of young people under the age of 18 to groups or for sponsorship is incompatible with current legislation in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. This is regardless of the young person’s own personal decision-making processes. The Board of Trustees of the World Service Office (WSO) advised all groups of a policy change in September 2024. WSO stated:

“Overeaters Anonymous, Inc. does not endorse allowing minors to attend face to face, online, telephone, or non-real-time meetings. Any decision to allow such individuals to attend a meeting is made locally. In this, OA is guided by the spirit of Tradition Four: “Each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.” It is recommended that a group or service body considering allowing minors to attend meetings, first obtain legal advice. Legal advice should be obtained before allowing such individuals to attend and before creating or instituting any applicable policies. Keep in mind that laws and rules regarding this issue may vary by country and jurisdiction. Other Twelve Step fellowships might be consulted or studied, but Overeaters Anonymous’ service structure is its own.

Note: The definition of a minor is based on the legal requirements within a state, province, and/or country”

GROUPS

Our groups need to be safe spaces for all members (Strong Meeting Checklist point 14). This places a responsibility on all of us as members to be respectful, courteous and kind to our fellows and keep our groups a safe space in all respects.

We need to consider

Are we welcoming and accepting?

Do we avoid advice giving and cross talk?

Do we share our experience, strength and hope?

Do we have rotation of service positions?

Is “what you see here, when you leave here, please let it stay here” (OA meeting format) being honoured? i.e. Are our membership and meeting shares kept confidential?

No member of any OA group is required to practice any actions in order to remain a member or have a voice within the group. The only criteria for membership is, a desire to stop eating compulsively.

The 12 Traditions are the basis for the functioning of any group and there is much OA literature to support groups. We would recommend members to be familiar with and apply the 12 Traditions when they are speaking, giving service or participating in groups. The strong meeting checklist is a useful tool to consider the actions of our groups in a group conscious discussion.

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Groups and service bodies may be required to make difficult decisions with the help of their collective higher power, via group conscience or service board meetings. This could include decisions in response to situations or behaviours that are considered to be disruptive, abusive or threatening in some way. Groups and Service Bodies can implement the OA Inc document: Guidelines for Dealing with Disruptive Behaviour Dealing with Disruptive Behaviour Affecting Overeaters Anonymous (Rev 6/22).

COMPLAINTS

If a fellow, a group or a service body dislike a decision made by a group or service body, they are permitted in line with OA Concept Five to make representation to the next level of service body using the OA Inc document: Conflict Resolution Worksheet (Rev 1/25).

OAGB recognises the principle of unity as promoted by OA Tradition One and will endeavour to follow this principle in the resolution of any complaints or concerns about a board decision or action.

SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship is one of the nine “Tools of Recovery” in OA. The relationship between sponsor and sponsee is a privileged one, and is a key element in our recovery journey. OA suggests that to find a sponsor “look for someone who has what you want” (Suggested Meeting Format). There are many methods of sponsorship in OA.

Sponsorship is about sharing our own experience, strength and hope within our own recovery journey. Sponsorship can, on occasions, be challenging for both sponsor and sponsee. All sponsors should be abstinent, working the twelve steps and have a sponsor of their own. There is much literature available which discusses the sponsor/sponsee relationship.

There have been occasions where the sponsee/sponsor relationship may have verged into coercive or controlling behaviours. To address this, a letter was sent

out from the Chair of the OA World Service Office Board of Trustees on 6th October 2017. Regarding sponsorship it states-

"Sponsors are not professionals when they are doing twelve step work. They ought only to share or suggest changes that worked for them on their journey. Sponsors should not issue orders or make demands, for example, when it comes to the use of medications. Sponsors should not give advice regarding medications or other substances. All members of OA may choose their own plan of eating, their Higher Power and how they work their program.

In OA we are here to care for our members. If a sponsor becomes controlling, or demands that you must behave in a certain way to recover, we suggest that you speak with a fellow member from another group or contact your local intergroup/service board, Region Chair or any Trustee to discuss the matter. You may change sponsors, or go to different meetings, to find other ways members use to heal from the disease of compulsive eating."

OA EVENTS

When planning or organising OA events for members (retreats, conventions, assemblies, annual meetings or public information events) it is important to recognise that such events can be emotionally challenging for participants however long their length of abstinence and/or stage of recovery.

Ensure that at such gatherings, the activities are entirely voluntary so that individuals can make positive choices about how, when and if they participate. Ensure that there are options for members to be quiet, to rest away from the main activities. Ensure that members are free to come and go as they please. Ensure that when advertising such events, it is clear that there will be options about how and when members participate.

When conducting Public Information events (conferences, exhibitions, trade shows) ensure that members are well-prepared and that the group trust one another. Ensure that there are sufficient members present to allow time for breaks for those giving service. Ensure that the only information given out is official OA documentation/literature.

Do not publish or promote personal contact details. This is to maintain the principle of anonymity and to keep both fellows and members of the public safe.

Being involved in organising or participating in such events means that a member is giving service. The principles of service in OA are outlined in our 12 Concepts. There is much OA literature available which provides guidance in organising OA recovery events or Public Information events.

WHAT IF YOU ARE WORRIED?

There may be occasions where you hear information from another member or observe something which might suggest that they are being abused or are an abuser. In OA we are encouraged not to make judgements about other people's behaviour. If you are worried about what you have heard or seen, it is suggested you speak to your sponsor or a trusted member. You may only know part of the story. Having a conversation with the person you are worried about may also put to rest your concerns. This will be the case in the vast majority of situations.

Having spoken to them, you may want to suggest they get specialist help for what is happening. We can only make suggestions from our own experience, strength and hope and would advise only making suggestions to the person concerned after speaking to your sponsor or another trusted member/ members.

If after taking the above actions you remain concerned that a member is part of an abusive situation (either as an abuser or as someone being abused) you may want to consider making local safeguarding services aware of your concerns. This may be through the Police or via the local authority (England, Scotland and Wales) or the Local Health and Social Care Board (Northern Ireland). You have the right to report a crime against yourself or another person. You will need to explain what you know and how you know it. The authorities will want to know information like your full name and contact details.

If you have urgent and critical concerns regarding an individual's situation which could lead to immediate loss of life, we suggest you ring 999 and give as much information as possible.

If you have concerns about how an OA group is functioning, we suggest that you speak to someone at the relevant Intergroup. Similarly, if you have concerns about an Intergroup, please contact the National Service Board.

CONCLUSION

In Overeaters Anonymous we have learnt that our 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts keep members groups and the organisation safe. As members and groups and service boards, we are better at being safe and in recovery together rather than acting alone.

Overeaters Anonymous (Great Britain).

April 2025