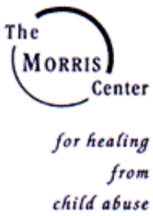
ASCA Training and Reference Manual



The Norma J. Morris Center
for healing from child abuse

Revision date: 02/11/2024

Preface

The *ASCA Training and Reference Manual* is a revision of the 2004 *ASCA Co-Facilitator Training Manual* with updated material. The original "ASCA Meeting Toolkit" that came with the manual has been revised and includes a new supportive feedback guide. The updated manual also has a new "ASCA Co-facilitator Toolkit," which contains the intervention job aid and guidance on the rare disinvitation process. Finally, the manual now contains the *Ongoing Education Reader,* formerly titled the *ASCA Meeting Guidebook* at the end. We hope this updated manual proves useful to you in your important role as an ASCA co-facilitator, and we welcome your feedback.

The Morris Center
February 13, 2024

Table of Contents
(Manual)

Part 1:
ASCA Co-facilitator Training Manual

We always knew that training facilitators to run safe meetings was going to be a foundation issue because we had to create *safety, safety, safety. Safety* kept coming up in the meetings over and over again just because of the intense [emotions] that people had [who] reported childhood abuse of any kind.[1]

Dr. Patrick Gannon,
Co-founder of ASCA
April 18, 2021

[1] Patrick Gannon, "Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) Self-help Peer Support Group - Patrick Gannon and Bo Smith," מכון חרוב Haruv Institute, Apr 18, 2021, 5:33 to 5:54, https://youtu.be/1QfOpqlvFVg.

Table of Contents (Part 1)

1.0 Welcome to Training

1.1 Welcome, and thank you for participating in upcoming training for ASCA Co-facilitators.

1.2 The goals of the workshop are to discuss, explore, and feel more comfortable with:

1.2.1 The nature, structure, and function of self-help support groups in general and ASCA in particular

1.2.2 Co-facilitator duties, roles, and skills

1.2.3 Communication and intervention skills

1.2.4 The ASCA support group process and dynamics

1.2.5 The organization of ASCA and the resource from The Morris Center

1.3 Our vision is that you will come away from this experience feeling more:

- Confident—about your skills and ability to learn how to facilitate ASCA meetings
- Secure—that you will have tools, resources, and support available as a co-facilitator
- Connected—to a wider community of ASCA meeting facilitators, board of directors members, and ASCA meeting veterans
- Inspired—about the ASCA program, your own leadership potential, and your own personal development
- Engaged—because you had fun learning

1.4 We have built our learning curriculum, which includes pre-work and follow-up mentoring, for ASCA co-facilitators on the following performance objectives—by the end of this learning process, participants will be able to:

- Recognize that you don't have to be "perfect" in the role of co-facilitator
- Explain the ASCA philosophy and meeting guidelines to other participants
- Collaborate and communicate with your partners (as co-facilitators) before, during, and after the meetings
- Create a safe and inviting environment for ASCA meeting participants
- Describe how to access the tools, information, and resources available to help you facilitate meetings
- Demonstrate how to handle simple situations that occur more frequently in meetings

- Explain how to handle difficult situations that occur less frequently in meetings
- Feel comfortable using the script to conduct a meeting

1.5 Focus of the Workshop and Self-study Manual: Training and Growth in Three Areas:

1.5.1 Organizational: how to run safe meetings

1.5.2 Interpersonal: effective teamwork and group interaction skills

1.5.3 Personal: how to deal with your own issues around abuse and recovery

1.6 Workshop Incorporates Multiple Learning Modalities

1.6.1 Experiential: role-plays and simulations in breakout rooms

1.6.2 Individual self-assessments and reflection

1.6.3 Group discussion

1.6.4 Question/answer sessions

1.6.5 Self-study: Reading Materials in Manual

1.7 Overview of the Training Manual

1.7.1 Pre-work: to help prepare you for the learning process

1.7.2 Post-self-assessment: section numbers correspond to numbered sections in the body of the manual

1.7.3 ASCA Meeting Toolkit: contains supplemental information to run an ASCA meeting

2.0 Pre-work

2.1 The purpose of participating in ASCA Co-facilitator Training is to:

- Prepare and support you in being excellent co-facilitators, and
- Help you enhance your life

2.2 We will accomplish this by:

- Acknowledging self-strengths and areas requiring growth
- Fostering reflectivity (e.g., what am I feeling?)
- Developing skills to respond to myself and to others
- Reading this Manual

2.3 Readings: To help you prepare for the upcoming workshop session, please read the entire manual and jot down any questions and concerns prior to the workshop.

2.4 Review the ASCA Meeting Guidelines and Ground Rules:

As a co-facilitator for ASCA support groups, remember: our guidelines provide the basis for group safety and empowerment. We derived the guidelines from the knowledge and principles discussed in the article “Defining Self-help Mutual Support Groups,” as well as the values that the founding (and current) members of ASCA believe in and have agreed to uphold. 3.0 Self-reflection on Readiness

3.0 Self-reflection on Readiness

Please take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions and jot down your initial thoughts and feelings. You may wish to share your thoughts with others during the workshop—or keep them as part of your private journal.

1. What are the feelings you associate with being or contemplating being an ASCA co-facilitator?

2. What are the words you would use to describe what it means to be or to consider being a co-facilitator?

3. What is the value to you of being a co-facilitator or a potential co-facilitator?

4. What do you think you need in order to become an excellent co-facilitator?

4.0 Learning Concepts for Co-facilitator Readiness

ROLES AND KEY COMPETENCIES (Knowledge, Skills, Behaviors):

4.1 Information (Organizational)

4.2 Nuts and Bolts of Running Meetings (Organizational)

4.3 Handling Difficult Meeting Situations (Interpersonal)

4.4 Leadership and Teamwork (Interpersonal)

4.5 Communication (Interpersonal)

4.6 Managing Personal Reactions (Personal)

4.7 Compassion, Empathy, Support (Personal)

4.8 Consistency, Reliability, Responsibility (Personal)

4.1 INFORMATION (Organizational)

4.1.1 Knowledge of Self-help Groups

See Section 2.0 Pre-work

4.1.2 Knowledge of Philosophy, Organizational Structure, and Administration of ASCA and its Relationship to The Morris Center

The Morris Center is a not-for-profit corporation established in 1991 to provide healing opportunities for adult survivors of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The Morris Center provides the ASCA program, training and education for survivors and professionals, and public awareness services. The Morris Center's most important role is in the development of the Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) Guided Self-help Recovery and Prevention Program.

ASCA is a registered service mark of The Morris Center. The Morris Center owns the copyrights for all of the materials produced by and for the ASCA program. The Morris Center is also responsible for the overall administration and licensing of the ASCA program.

ASCA is based on a three-stage psychological recovery model first described by J. Patrick Gannon, PhD, in his book *Soul Survivors: A New Beginning for Adults Abused as Children* (Simon & Schuster, 1989), which was updated in 2014 and 2022. Dr. Gannon was the clinical consultant for The Morris Center from 1993–1995. He, along with a committee of fellow survivors, adapted the original 21 steps of the three-stage model to serve the ASCA program.

Unlike twelve-step programs, the ASCA recovery principles are psychological in nature rather than spiritual. ASCA is based on the idea of "guided self-help," which includes training co-facilitators (themselves survivors) to run support group meetings.

In the case of in-person meetings, if a geographic region has more than one ASCA meeting, co-facilitators can work with other co-facilitators to organize a "service council", which meets regularly to review common meeting issues, recruit new co-facilitators, publicize meetings, and plan training events.

The ASCA program can provide a variety of service opportunities, ranging from being a co-facilitator for your own meetings to creating or serving on a regional service council and/or serving on various committees for The Morris Center. All service opportunities augment survivors' traditional recovery activities by developing skills that we can apply to other areas of our lives.

4.1.3 Knowledge of Roles for The Morris Center, Co-facilitators, and Meeting Participants

Volunteerism is the "heart and soul" of The Morris Center. So, we should clarify some roles within ASCA and The Morris Center.

Key Roles of The Morris Center Board of Directors:

- Oversee the direction and development of The Morris Center's programs, including ASCA.
- Develop and evaluate the training and research aspects of ASCA and other programs of The Morris Center.

Key Roles of Co-facilitators:

- Run the ASCA meetings and facilitate their continued growth and vitality
- Run monthly business meetings
- Ensure an orderly transition to the next co-facilitator team once their term of service expires

Key Responsibilities of Meeting Participants:

- **Adhere faithfully to the meeting format**, which promotes group safety
- Contribute financial support to sustain the overall health of the meetings
- Provide support to co-facilitators
- Help to grow the ASCA meeting so that other survivors can heal themselves

Everyone has some level of responsibility for how ASCA is run and developed over time. That is the spirit of "self-help"—collaboration through commitment and respect for the mutual benefit of ASCA and its members.

4.1.4 Knowledge of Community Resources for Survivors

Co-facilitators need to know what other kinds of services are available in their communities to assist survivors as they progress through recovery. These services should include crisis and emergency services such as telephone hotlines, 24-hour hospital emergency rooms, crisis mental health services, suicide prevention, medical services, low-cost psychotherapy services, community conflict and mediation boards, and twelve-step meetings.

Maintaining a community resource list fulfills one of the key benefits of self-help meetings: sharing information about resources that can augment a survivor's recovery plan.

4.1.5 Knowledge of General Issues in Child Abuse and Reporting

It is very helpful for co-facilitators to have some general knowledge of child abuse—its causes, effects, and likely consequences for adult survivors. You can obtain this by reading any of the popular books on the subject available at bookstores, online, or the library. Remember, you don't have to become an expert in the field of child abuse, but consider how knowledge translates into power. Knowing about how you and others were affected by child abuse is one strategy for enhancing your recovery.

One crucial piece of information every co-facilitator needs to know has to do with the laws about reporting child abuse. In some places, child abuse is viewed as a crime by law. Check with your local laws because it can be a legal requirement to report it. In any case, please consider that with recovery comes responsibility for the prevention of child abuse, whether you witness it or hear others who witness it.

Reporting child abuse serves two primary purposes: 1) protecting the child, and 2) getting help for the abusive parent or caretaker. If the abuser is also a survivor (and the vast majority are), their recovery must begin with refraining from abusing children or engaging in any type of domestic violence.

If you see or hear of a child being abused, you may voluntarily make a report by calling your local Child Protection Services.[2] If, while serving as a co-facilitator at an ASCA meeting, you hear of a child being abused, you

[2] This applies to the USA.

may want to approach the person who conveyed that information and inquire how you or they might make a child abuse report. Remember that, for the report to be accepted, you will need to have identifying information about the child and the abuser so that the authorities can locate them.

While this action might appear to some to violate the confidentiality agreement of self-help meetings, the protection of a child from child abuse must be an overriding priority. ASCA members and co-facilitators cannot be expected to maintain silence about another member's abusive behavior. If you encounter a situation that involves making a child abuse report, you can get some additional emotional support from:

- Your therapist or counselor
- Your service council (if you have one in your region)
- The Morris Center

4.2 NUTS AND BOLTS OF RUNNING ASCA MEETINGS (Organizational)

4.2.1 Co-facilitator Meeting Tasks/Checklist

See Section 10.0 for the Meeting Tasks and Checklist

4.2.2 Meeting Administration

See Section 10.0 for ASCA meeting administration tips and guidelines

4.2.3 Promoting Meeting Development

See Section 11.0 for Meeting Development Ideas

4.2.4 Assessing and Understanding Group Dynamics

See Section 7.1 for group dynamics

4.2.5 Problem-solving When Needed

During the course of running meetings, you may encounter situations that require some quick thinking on your part. Because the ASCA meeting format has been tested over a number of years, these situations tend to be rare. Nevertheless, participants may make particular requests to accommodate a special need. Examples:

- After several minutes of silence during the "tag" share section of the meeting, a person who has already shared requests to speak again. Here, **we would not** make a change to the format, and we would not allow a person to share twice.
- The meeting has only a few attendees who are all familiar with the standard reading, and a request is made to eliminate some of the reading. Here, **we would not** make the change because it risks breaking the habit of consistency, which promotes a feeling of safety.

- Your co-facilitator becomes sick at the last minute, and someone volunteers (preferably someone who has been trained) to take the other co-facilitator role. Here, **we would** make the change because it **does not** break the meeting format.

Always try to maintain the meeting format. Please do not make any alterations to the meeting that undermine the general principles of safety and support or the spirit of ASCA.

4.2.6 How and When to Call Business Meetings

See Section 10.7 for information about calling and conducting a business meeting.

4.3 HANDLING DIFFICULT MEETING SITUATIONS (Interpersonal)

4.3.1 How to Intervene When Format Challenges Occur

See Section 7.4 for challenges to the meeting format.

4.3.2 How to Intervene in Crisis Situations

See Section 7.4.3 for the survivor who is having a crisis.

4.3.3 Proposing Compromise Solutions to Resolve Conflict

This point is similar to the Problem-solving issue mentioned in Section 4.2.5 under Nuts and Bolts of Running an ASCA Meeting. There are many meeting-level issues that need to be decided upon by the co-facilitators and participants. We describe the process of making these decisions as "consensus-building."

We suggest that you discuss any conflict resolutions in your monthly or quarterly business meetings,[3] where time and format permit a full airing of views. If a participant wants you to make a decision on the spot during a recovery meeting, try to defer the issue to the next business meeting. If appropriate, invite the survivor to make a brief presentation at the business meeting.

As co-facilitators, how do you give everyone their chance to provide input, feel listened to, and engage in discussion before arriving at a compromise decision that everyone can live with? In this situation, you are functioning more as the facilitator of a meeting than as a boss who arbitrarily imposes a decision.

After a reasonable amount of discussion, see if you can summarize the various positions of the group. Then address where the positions seem to

[3] This applies to community-based meetings, not necessarily provider-based meetings (see "Defining Self-help Mutual Support Groups" in the "ASCA Meeting Toolkit").

be in keeping with the ideals and values of ASCA. If a particular decision is going to undermine the meeting format or spirit of safety, you should express that concern and suggest some alternatives.

Look for the solution that would satisfy everyone or that everyone can support in some way. Suggest it and see how people respond to it. Accept modifications to the solution **if they can bring everyone together without threatening safety or the basic tenets of the ASCA program**.

If you and your co-facilitator get "stuck" in this process, defer the decision to the next business meeting and discuss it with your service council (if one exists in your region) or a trusted advisor. The Morris Center can help clarify and provide guidance on meeting guidelines and "best practices". You may also want to check if there is a local non-profit conflict resolution organization in your county that might provide free counseling for your situation.

4.3.4 For More Information, See later in the "ASCA Meeting Toolkit":

- "Co-facilitator Interventions"
- "ASCA Supportive Feedback Guide"

4.3.5 For More Information, See later in the "ASCA Co-facilitator Toolkit":

- "ASCA Co-facilitator Intervention Job Aid"

4.4 LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK (Interpersonal)

4.4.1 Visualizing Your "Ideal Leader"

Being a co-facilitator involves an element of leadership. You are empowered by the group to remind everyone to follow the meeting format for a purpose that the entire group shares. You are convening the meeting, and fulfilling the trust that is vested in you as a co-facilitator to enforce the guidelines and ground rules.

Many survivors avoid taking on leadership roles because of ambivalent feelings about power, authority, and leadership. Learning how to provide leadership and model healthy authority is one way in which the role of co-facilitator can help you resolve some of your underlying abuse issues. But it will take practice and, like any challenge, a certain amount of courage and perseverance.

Try to visualize the type of leader you would like to be. You may have trouble thinking of a role model because your parent figures are rated poorly in this capacity. So, think of who in the media, books, or history you admire and why. What is it about their styles that you like?

In ASCA, we do not encourage leadership styles that are authoritarian and dogmatic because our self-help model is based on the value of empowerment. Are you able to communicate in a calm, considerate, yet firm way? Can you be thoughtful and reflective while, at the same time, being decisive?

Everyone has a different personality, and what is right for one person may be wrong for another. One basic ingredient of leadership is the capacity to feel comfortable being you. Some people refer to this as “presence.”

Try writing a list of all the characteristics and qualities of your “ideal leader,” and then think about these before and after each meeting. Allow yourself to work towards this ideal over time. Be careful not to have too many expectations—or to try to be perfect from the beginning. Persevere in your vision and efforts. Eventually, you will succeed in trying to integrate many of the behaviors of your ideal leader.

4.4.2 Public Speaking

You probably have heard that public speaking is the number one anxiety-producing activity for Americans today. So, if you are anxious about speaking in front of a meeting, **join the club!**

Most people get anxious before meetings. But don’t let nervousness deter you. You are not alone. Talk to your co-facilitator about it. Have a glass of water nearby so you can quench the “dry mouth syndrome.” Always use the script! The meeting format is broken up to give you breathing space. Learn to take some long, slow, deep breaths. Try to speak slowly, concentrating on each word.

Practice reading the meeting script out loud until you know it well. Try to pause after each sentence. Remember to breathe while you talk. Imagine speaking in a conversational tone, as though you were speaking to a friend.

If you feel stuck or overly anxious, discuss it with your co-facilitator, your therapist, or a good friend. Read a book on relaxation. Watch how other co-facilitators handle the public speaking chores and ask them for tips. JUST DO YOUR BEST. Remember, you are both a fellow survivor as well as a co-facilitator. With practice, you will get better, week-by-week.

4.4.3 Modeling Healthy Authority

As we mentioned in the section on “Leadership,” we want co-facilitators to express healthy authority without being authoritarian. Healthy authority

means carrying out the tasks of the co-facilitator role in a manner that reflects ASCA values of empathy, compassion, and respect.

Healthy authority also means holding firm to the meeting guidelines that enhance safety. You can “hold firm” in a nice way that respects the other person. The way you model healthy authority in your role will help define the culture of your particular meeting.

4.4.4 “Holding” the Meeting

The idea of “holding” a meeting means creating a space that communicates to the meeting participants a sense of safety, containment, and support. This is done by the co-facilitators’ presence—how you communicate with each other and behave in the group is important. Not just the words you say but also the tone of your voice and your facial expressions are important.

Think of people you might have known who had this presence—a teacher, a friend’s parent, or maybe your therapist. The way they behave evokes a feeling of calm, safety and general well-being.

Meeting participants need to sense that “things are under control.” This will be very reassuring and cut down on the number of challenges to the format. It will also deepen the level of sharing. **Acting as a team will help you both** create this type of presence.

4.4.5 Demonstrating Teamwork with Your Co-facilitator

Ideally, you and your co-facilitator act as a team that supports and complements each other in your efforts to run safe, consistent meetings. Demonstrating teamwork means:

- Stay in communication with each other around the planning of the meetings
- Conduct short debriefs with each other after each meeting to help you stay in touch
- Make sure each of you knows what the other is responsible for
- Share the various tasks of each of the co-facilitator roles
- Ask the other for help when needed
- Request clarification when you are unclear on how to proceed
- Consult with each other if a situation comes up that needs a decision
- Consult with each other on any circumstances that require you to collaborate and come up with a solution

Teamwork also means supporting each other emotionally. If one of you is having a bad day, tell the other and offer or ask for something that may

make it easier. The bottom line is that working as a team makes the experience more fun and rewarding.

Teamwork is a skill that is in high demand in most jobs. The experience you gain while working as part of a co-facilitator team is something that you can apply throughout your life.

4.4.6 Teamwork Challenges

Interventions require teamwork. Even though one co-facilitator initiates an intervention, it is best to think of all interventions as a team effort. **Both co-facilitators**, intervene although only one might actually speak. "Backing up" your co-facilitator exhibits the highest form of teamwork. It is precisely because of interventions that we have two co-facilitators. Each provides mutual support and reassurance for the other.

Each member of the team has a responsibility. During an intervention for a guideline violation, the co-facilitator who did not initiate the intervention should be alert and aware of ways to verbally and non-verbally support the other co-facilitator.

If the person is not accepting what your co-facilitator is saying, it is essential that you help support the intervention. As the non-intervening co-facilitator, try to find a way to get the violator to accept the intervention. This allows the meeting to continue in an orderly fashion.

- Try a different (short) explanation of the intervention
- Make a suggestion to speak later—after the meeting

Always **try** to have one "stock" line ready that you can use even under duress to get you into the discussion. Those first few words may be the hardest to say, but other words or phrases will follow more easily. It is a matter of overcoming your "verbal and emotional inertia."

📖 For example: "Let me jump in here." or "Can we talk about this right after the meeting? You're welcome to join us in our short debrief and we can discuss further"

"It sounds like you might be feeling ____. We are intervening because we are concerned about safety. Can we talk about it later?"

📖 "This conversation is not feeling comfortable for us. We are all survivors here, and we all need to feel safe, including us, the co-facilitators. You may have different feelings about this, but this is not the place or the process to resolve it. Can we agree to finish the meeting out and discuss it later?"

Try a different approach than your partner did. If your partner's intervention was soft, try being firmer. If their approach seemed authoritarian, try being more relaxed and flexible without invalidating your partner's efforts. Always offer the chance to talk more about the issue after the meeting.

Any number of factors can raise the complexity of the situation. For example:

- More than one meeting member jumps into the discussion
- The interchange gets heated
- The violator or someone else starts to get aggressive
- Your co-facilitator looks beleaguered

Not jumping in at this point is to fall short on the teamwork quotient.

Remember that your prime responsibility as a co-facilitator is to provide and maintain group safety and support. This means reminding people when they break from the format or cross one of the guidelines. Each member of the group, including you and your co-facilitator, is entitled to that support. Imagine yourself in the same situation. Think of how you would want your teammate to support you. Anything you can do to shift the focus away from your partner will provide the break they need to catch their breath.

4.5 COMMUNICATION (Interpersonal)

4.5.1 Active Listening, Clear Thinking, Thoughtful Responding

Let's say that the person has agreed to meet with you and your co-facilitator after the meeting to discuss their concern. Communication is a complex interaction between people. For our purposes, think of it as a three-step process of 1) active listening, 2) clear thinking, and 3) thoughtful responding. This process repeats itself over and over again until the interaction is completed.

Active listening means not only concentrating on what is being said to you, but also communicating to others that you understand what is being said. You can demonstrate your understanding by:

- Nodding your head
- Summarizing or paraphrasing what you heard
- Asking clarifying questions

Once people feel heard and understood, they typically relax a bit, which allows their message to be processed by the listener.

Clear thinking means taking the message and deciphering its meaning, value, and purpose in relation to the question being addressed. Clear thinking means being able to identify any areas of misunderstandings—so that you can move the discussion toward a viable solution.

You will need to communicate back to the person in a rational, thoughtful way. The purpose of your comments may be to facilitate further discussion, come to a soluton or buy time for future consideration. Whatever you decide to do, it's important to communicate it in a way that leaves the person feeling respected, appreciated for having made the suggestion, and involved in the higher goal of doing what is best for the meeting—even if that means not endorsing their idea.

This is a tall order, to say the least! It is often best to stick to the content of the issue being discussed so that the interaction doesn't become personal.

While many verbal interactions are simply a transfer of information, more challenging communication involves discussion to resolve something. That's where this three-step process may be most helpful.

4.5.2 Assertiveness Without Aggression or Avoidance

Being assertive without lapsing into either aggressiveness on the one end or avoidance on the other is challenging for most survivors. Avoidance stems from a fear of speaking up, and aggressiveness is an angry overreaction against the fear. Assertiveness means being able to intervene with both sensitivity and firmness when a format violation occurs. Assertiveness means being in control and stating what needs to be done in order for the meeting to proceed.

Assertiveness is one skill that survivors may need to practice or get additional training on in order to put it into practice. The hardest part is trying it out for the first time. After that, it starts to get easier to be assertive in other areas of your life as well.

4.5.3 When in Doubt, Buy Some Time, Consult with Others

To be sure, there will be situations that come up for which you or your co-facilitator are not prepared or are unsure of how to respond. One good strategy to remember is "when in doubt, buy some time," so that you can consult with your co-facilitator or an outside resource. Deferring a decision is always better than making a bad decision on the spot.

We always want the meeting to proceed uninterrupted if possible. Buying time and deferring discussion until after the meeting, is a “safety valve” to defuse potentially disruptive issues.

You can say:

- 🕮 “I understand your concern, but we have to continue the meeting. So, could we agree to talk about this after the meeting?”
- 🕮 “That suggestion sounds OK, but could we defer the decision until the next Business Meeting where we will have time to gather group feedback?”
- 🕮 “Let’s put this on the agenda for our next Business Meeting, OK?”

4.5.4 For More Information

See the “Communication Skills and Tips” handout in the “ASCA Meeting Toolkit” later in this manual.

4.6 MANAGING PERSONAL REACTIONS (Personal)

4.6.1 Balancing Your Own Recovery Needs With Your Co-facilitator Responsibilities

See Section 9.1 for discussion

4.6.2 When to Shift to Personal Recovery in Meetings

See Section 9.2 for discussion

4.6.3 Not Getting Triggered by Others’ Stories

See Section 9.3 for the discussion

4.6.4 Knowing When You Need Help and Asking for It

See Section 9.4 for the discussion

4.6.5 Handling Anxiety in a Healthy Way

See Section 9.4 for the discussion

4.7 COMPASSION/EMPATHY/SUPPORT (Personal)

4.7.1 Developing Your Emotional Voice

Your voice is your instrument for conveying the emotional values of recovery—compassion, empathy, and support.

Try practicing the meeting script alone and recording it. Explore how to use your voice to communicate the emotional values that you deem important. This point also ties into what we said earlier about being the

kind of leader you want to be. (See Section 4.4.1, *Visualizing Your Ideal Leader.*)

4.7.2 Respecting Personal Boundaries

Co-facilitators need to know their own boundaries so they will not become involved with others' dilemmas beyond their own capacities to help. Being a co-facilitator doesn't mean becoming co-dependent with other survivors. Co-facilitators are not like sponsors (as twelve-step groups define sponsors).

The best times to make more one-on-one contact with participants are before and after the meetings. During these times, **be careful not to step into the role of therapist by telling other survivors what to do**. That is for each person to figure out. We do not offer advice to each other both during and after the meetings. Your role as both a fellow survisor and co-facilitator is to listen, provide support, and encourage other participants to work their recovery in whatever ways they find helpful.

4.7.3 Style That Reflects Personal Warmth, Respect, Competence, and Fairness

Co-facilitators tneed to model a manner of interacting with others that projects the values underlying the ASCA program. That means practicing the guidelines and ground rules (for example, no advice, no psychoanalysis) both inside and outside the meetings. We value emotional warmth and empathy, as well as respect for self and others. We challenge ourselves to maintain a certain standard of functioning, which incorporates a sense of competence and objectivity about ourselves .

Self-empowerment, respect, and mutual support are what ASCA is all about. As co-facilitators, you are bearers of these traditions. By honoring these traditions and values, you help to establish the appropriate meeting culture that is so crucial to recovery. In doing so, you also help set a recovery direction for yourself. This can both challenge you and offer an opportunity for mastery. Remember: you are both a fellow survivor and co-facilitator in the meeting.Newcomers, who are in earlier stages of recovery, look for a safe place with others who may be further along in their healing journey.

4.8 CONSISTENCY, RELIABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY (personal)

4.8.1 Taking Your Commitment Seriously

Being a co-facilitator of a meeting requires a certain level of commitment to other survivors, who rely on you to conduct a safe, predictable meeting

each week. For many survivors, this commitment may be more than they can bear.

If you are in recovery, this necessary level of commitment may clash with your own internal feelings, problems in your adult life, or reactions to hearing “war stories” week after week.

We want you to do what is best for you. Once you decide to become a co-facilitator and take the training, we expect that you will do your very best to carry out your commitment. If you need help, or if your situation changes so that you need to take a break, ask for help from your fellow co-facilitators. Begin to transition your role to another person.

The best plan is to make an objective assessment of your readiness before, during, or immediately after you complete your training.

- Review Section 4.0 to see if any of the categories of co-facilitator functioning seem beyond your capacities at this point.
- Discuss your concerns honestly with other co-facilitators, your local service council, and The Morris Center workshop trainers.

4.8.2 Taking Responsibility for Co-facilitator Tasks

Being a co-facilitator also means taking responsibility for a variety of tasks (see Section 10.0 for a list of these tasks).

Since the beginning of ASCA, we have found that some amount of meeting administration, basic accounting, meeting promotion, and contact with your local service council (and The Morris Center) is necessary to make the meetings work effectively.

We have outlined these tasks in the Co-facilitator Guidelines (Section 10.0) for your convenience. Please take these responsibilities seriously. We can make ASCA an effective and efficient self-help program without becoming bureaucratic.

4.8.3 Following the ASCA Format Precisely

We ask the co-facilitators to make a special effort to stick to the ASCA meeting format as precisely as possible. Many of us worked long and hard to create a format that ensures safety—a feature that is so essential to the success of self-help groups. Learn the format so that you know how it works and, better yet, know *why* we do what we do to maintain safety.

You may question why something is organized a certain way, especially if you are used to conducting other types of meetings. Changing the format won’t necessarily make the meeting better. The basic purpose of following

the format consistently over time is that it makes the meeting predictable and, therefore, safe.

Ideally, a survivor from California should be able to attend an ASCA meeting in Illinois or South Africa and know exactly the guidelines they will need to follow and how the meeting will flow. Remember, as co-facilitators, you are the “protectors” of the meeting’s safety. See Sections 7.2 and 7.3 for further discussion.

4.8.4 Punctuality and Accountability

At a very basic level, being a co-facilitator means

- Starting the meeting on time
- Presenting the meeting format exactly the way it is written
- Ending the meeting on time
- Following through on other co-facilitator tasks

If you agree to provide something to the meeting participants, please follow through. Your credibility as a responsible co-facilitator is on the line. Remember that survivors typically had inconsistent authority figures in their lives. We want to model “healthy” authority. Your function as a responsible and consistent meeting co-facilitator is the best way to provide that.

4.8.5 Maintaining a Consistent Presence Over Time

Beyond commitment, responsibility, punctuality, and accountability, there is one other suggestion that will help you in your role as co-facilitator. We ask you to maintain as consistent a “presence” as possible when you are running a meeting. This means showing up in your “role” as co-facilitator (however you identify that for yourself) consistently week after week.

Remember, that most abusive parents were anything but consistent. Survivors will typically feel anxious when someone they look to for structure and safety suddenly starts appearing erratic.

Of course, always being consistent represents an ideal. We are certainly not asking you to be a robot! When you open a meeting, just think of how you want to come across to others and try to be as consistent as possible.

One way to do this is to stay in close communication with your fellow co-facilitator. Ask for their feedback after the meetings. Be ready to reciprocate by offering your feedback (if they are open to it). Rely on the power of teamwork in this role. Ask for help when you need it.

Last but not least, set up a support network outside of the ASCA meetings where you can process some of the difficult feelings, which may come up

for you while serving as a co-facilitator for ASCA meetings. If possible, find a therapist who is trained in the field of child abuse and understands the important role self-help plays in adult survivors' healing. They can act as an objective and trusted resource to help you learn and grow from each challenge.

5.0 Qualifications, Experience, and Expectations for ASCA Volunteer Co-facilitators

Purpose:

The Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) program offers many support groups throughout the USA and internationally. These groups are for adults recovering from the after-effects of childhood abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, mental, and neglect). ASCA groups provide a safe environment for people to express feelings, give and receive support, learn about recovery from childhood abuse, and discover ways to more effectively cope with self-destructive behaviors while nurturing their emerging healthy selves.

The Morris Center offers ASCA program materials at no fee through our website at www.ascasupport.org. ASCA support groups are, therefore, usually offered on a donation basis or at a low provider fee (typically, $10–20). Most groups meet once a week. Volunteers, who are also fellow survivors of childhood abuse, facilitate these support groups.

We are always interested in speaking with individuals who are interested in facilitating ASCA support groups. We offer training. Below you will find information on the types of people we look for and the expectations we have of our facilitators.

Qualifications:

People who are interested but who lack experience or skill in some of these areas should still consider signing up for training.

- ❑ Interested in running an ASCA meeting
- ❑ Comfortable with the expression of emotions
- ❑ Flexible in responding to the needs of participants
- ❑ Comfortable with providing leadership
- ❑ Able to set and maintain a positive tone
- ❑ Able to separate personal needs and group needs
- ❑ Actively working on their own recovery issues
- ❑ Previous or current involvement in ASCA meetings
- ❑ Reliable/Punctual
- ❑ Good listening skills
- ❑ Good communication skills

Experience:

We also think it is helpful to have the following experience:

- ❑ Knowledge of childhood abuse recovery and related issues
- ❑ Personal experiences with professional therapy and/or self-help programs
- ❑ Prior facilitator and/or support group experiences

- ❑ Awareness of the various community and professional resources available in the local area
- ❑ Participation in self-help mutual support groups as a member

Expectations:

A support group co-facilitator must be prepared to make the following commitments:

- ❑ Participate fully in a thorough initial training program, which may include workshops, support group participation, and meetings.
- ❑ Commit to at least three months of volunteering as a co-facilitator (3–4 hours weekly, including the meeting, travel, phone calls, co-facilitator consultation and support, business meetings, etc.).
- ❑ Follow the Co-facilitator Guidelines (Section 10.0) and the ASCA Meeting Guidelines.
- ❑ Follow the "ASCA Co-facilitator's Meeting Checklist of Duties" (in the "ASCA Co-facilitator Toolkit" at the end of the manual) as closely as possible.

Rewards:

The ideal candidate is motivated intrinsically by a desire to help themselves and fellow survivors recover from childhood abuse.

As a co-facilitator candidate, you will receive important training in group dynamics and facilitation. This experience will prove valuable in all aspects of your life.

6.0 Notes for Processing the Workshop Role Plays on Interventions

6.1 We will first ask how the co-facilitators felt in responding to the role in which they were intervening.

6.2 It will be helpful if the co-facilitators can identify what, if anything, they may need in terms of strategy, or phraseology to respond in the way they think is appropriate.

6.3 Next, we will ask the person playing the role how they felt. What was your sense of being heard and reconciled with following the guidelines, as suggested by the co-facilitator?

6.4 After that, we will open up for comments from observers.

6.5 Remember that responding to meeting safety challenges is one of the most difficult aspects of being a co-facilitator. We are emphasizing this skill because it requires the most training and practice.

6.6 It is rare that a co-facilitator trainee feels completely successful in their first efforts to intervene. Remember that you are here to learn. You will continue to learn the more you practice.

6.7 Use the next section for making notes.

Write down any questions, thoughts, reactions, or observations from the role plays.

7.0 Group Dynamics, Safety, Structure, Format Challenges, and Interventions

7.1. Group Dynamics

7.1.1 Groups are like living organisms—alive, changing, and shifting in boundaries, needs, motivations, and points of view. They share one interpersonal space and become a community.

7.1.2 Underlying this reality is the fact that child abuse, at its core, is an INTERPERSONAL CRIME. It occurs between people. That is why we must stress safety.

7.1.3 ASCA meetings may trigger reactions based on a survivor's own childhood and family experience. Thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and fears can all come "alive" in the meetings. These feelings then become available for working through and processing at a later time. This is part of the recovery process.

7.1.4 The basic purpose of the meetings is to hear others talk about their recovery from abuse and to allow each survivor to address abuse issues in a fundamentally healthier context than one's family.

7.1.5 To do that, we must create a structure that supports pro-recovery activities, values, and shared commitment.

7.1.6 As co-facilitators, you help hold the "safe space"—a space where survivors can experience consistency, reliability, and safety. You remind people when they deviate from the fomat or cross one of the guidelines. Remember, "we all bear responsibility for keeping the meeting helpful and safe.".

7.2 Safety

7.2.1 One of the most common threats to the safety of a support group is cross-talk. A participant might refer to another's share with a comment like, "I was really moved by your description of being woken in the middle of the night." This may seem natural, empathetic, and harmless. How does cross-talk threaten group safety?

Referring to another person in the group can trigger feelings between participants—intentionally or unintentionally—which they cannot easily resolve during the meeting. The person referred to may feel misunderstood or misrepresented. Someone not referred to may feel overlooked. Other participants may feel anxious about what kind of remarks may be directed toward them after they share their "most vulnerable secrets." There is no format in the meeting to handle this kind

of emotional response between participants. Left without a means of clarification, these emotional responses may cause people to avoid the meeting. That is why cross-talk threatens the safety of the group as a whole.

7.2.2 One of the biggest challenges for co-facilitators is to "hold" to the structure, even in the face of challenges from participants (we'll talk about that later).

7.2.3 Any change to the meeting is a challenge to safety:

- Room changes or virtual meeting login information changes
- Changes in co-facilitators
- Changes in format
- Inconsistency in interventions

7.2.4 Meetings, which promote a feeling of safety, challenge survivors' fears of people and replace the fear with a feeling of connection and mutuality. Mastering the fear of people develops self-confidence.

7.2.5 As survivors, we all need to confront our fear of people, which is one purpose ASCA serves.

- Mastery of interpersonal fears
- Mastery of confronting the abuse
- Counteracting the "conspiracy of silence," which results from the abuse

7.2.6 People can grow when they feel safe enough to do it. That is why people can change once they get out of the abusive family.

7.3 Structure and Consistency

7.3.1 The meeting format is our structure—the frame for each survivor's experience, which helps us all be in the meeting and deal with abuse and recovery.

7.3.2 Think of it as a holding environment—the structure that you help maintain is like hands supporting survivors' efforts to heal.

7.3.3 Survivors heal when they experience enough safety and containment of their emotional fears to look at what happened to them. The regularity and predictability of the meeting format free up energy to face difficult feelings and memories.

7.3.4 As co-facilitators, you are a group participant who has agreed to temporarily act in the role of reminding the group (when we forget) about meeting guidelines and ground rules. These are critical to maintaining the safety so crucial to survivors' recovery.

7.4 Format Challenges

7.4.1 SPEAKER TALKS TOO LONG AND DISREGARDS TIME SIGNAL

A good idea is to ask for a volunteer from the participants to be the timekeeper, because it helps share the responsibility for keeping the meeting safe. But if no one volunteers, it is ultimately the responsibility of one of the co-facilitators to fulfill this role.

Typically, participants adhere to the time format. Once in a while, someone may disregard the timekeeper's signal. The rule of thumb is that we signal people at the agreed-upon interval before their time is up. And we signal them once again when the time is up. If they continue talking beyond that time signal, one of the co-facilitators will need to interrupt them and ask them to stop. Examples:

- 🕮 "Bill, we'd like to hear more, but we're out of time. Thank you."
- 🕮 "Jane, we really need to stop here. Thank you."

The strategy that works best is to:

1. Be positive
2. State the need to stop, and then
3. Thank them

Consistency in timekeeping serves the group's need to be fair to everyone.

7.4.2 DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

Disruptive behavior is any situation in which a speaker

- Interjects cross-talk comments into shares
- Holds side conversations
- Shows an agitated state of behavior, such as getting up and walking around.
- Uses derogatory or defamatory language
- Verbally attacks the group or individuals in the meeting

In general, the person disrupting seems more involved with themselves and their agenda (whatever that may be) than with what is going on in the meeting itself. It could be a matter of being new to the meeting, insensitivity, a reaction to something they heard, or a need to be the center of attention.

- We are not asking you to diagnose them on the spot. But try to get a sense of what the motivation for the behavior might be.

- You will need to first ask them to refrain from whatever they are doing, and second, offer to discuss what is bothering them after the meeting.
- Depending on what they do and how they respond to requests to refrain, you will need to deal with the problem in the short term while the meeting process is suspended so that the meeting can resume.
- You do not want one person to have the power to disrupt the meeting format or the safety of the group. Examples:

  📖 "Excuse me. Could you please not _____? We have a ground rule on _____ (for example, "no side conversations"). Thank you."

  📖 "It looks or sounds like something might be troubling you. Could we agree to discuss this after the meeting?"
- The issue with using excessive profanity or inflammatory language is "acting out with words" rather than "using words to express the anger." We always want to model the latter in managing the emotional byproducts of abuse. This distinction may be subtle for some ASCA meeting participants, but in the interest of maintaining meeting safety for all, it is a good idea that the co-facilitators address this challenge of the meeting format. Example:

  📖 "Excuse me, _____, I know you are feeling the anger and rage at what was done to you when you use that word, but please be mindful that some survivors in the meeting can get triggered or upset by that word. This is why we have a guideline against using derogatory language and a ground rule against excessive profanity. Thank you."
- If the person won't postpone discussion about the guideline violation, etc. until after the meeting, the next-best strategy is to ask the person to step out of the meeting.

7.4.3 SURVIVOR WHO IS HAVING A CRISIS

This is a delicate situation in which a survivor is experiencing severe anxiety, loss of control of feelings or behavior (including verbalizations), loss of reality awareness, or moving around in an agitated state. The survivor may think they are somewhere else or think people are doing something bad to them.

🗣 "Could I have a volunteer to sit with _____ to support them through what they are going through?"

- If no one volunteers, ask your co-facilitator to leave with the person. **Note, however, that neither you nor anyone else should go outside with a participant if you feel that they may harm or hurt you in any way.**
- Once outside of the meeting, try to calm the person down. Try asking when things started getting difficult today. See if you can figure out what the trigger is. If the person can identify this, let them talk it out; empathize with them.
- Ask the person if they know anyone whom they can talk to for help. Think of some of the Daily Survival Tips in the "Welcome to ASCA" handout and ask the person to try them out. Inquire whether or not the person has a therapist or what they normally do when they find themselves in this place.
- If nothing works, call security and have them call the police, who will take the person to Psychiatric Emergency Services at the local hospital. In the U.S., there is a 988 number, and some counties have Crisis Intervention Teams CITs.
- Stay with the person until security arrives. Offer to call them later to check in.
- If a better solution appears (for example, a friend or acquaintance comes forward who will escort the person home), go with that. Use your judgment about what would be best for the person. Safety is paramount. So, don't leave them alone if you don't trust their condition.
- Don't try to drive the person to the emergency room yourself. Call the police to handle that option.

7.4.4 TALKING OUT OF TURN

This may be due to unfamiliarity with the meeting format, simple insensitivity, or, possibly, a strong reaction to what is being talked about.

- 🕮 "Excuse me, _____has the floor now. Once they are finished, you can raise your hand to volunteer for the next tag share, and we have a ground rule about no side conversations. Let's try to stay with the format listed in the handout."
- 🕮 "Excuse me. We have a ground rule about no side conversations. If you'd like to talk among yourselves, please step outside the meeting."

7.4.5 WRONG OR INAPPROPRIATE IDEA STATED AS FACT

- This is an unusual but important challenge because it requires you to make a judgment about what is being said. We don't want "wrong" ideas or suggestions to be represented as facts without some question being raised about their validity.
- In general, clearly wrong, dangerous, or aggressive ideas, plans, or behaviors may need to be "tabbed" by the co-facilitators as something that may not be true or valid.
- Consider that such interventions are even more necessary when the inappropriate idea is stated by the survivor as an **intended future action or something they suggest others do.** In other words, if there is some danger to themselves or others or even criminal action implied by the speaker's words or plans, then the co-facilitators should definitely speak up.
- Examples of inappropriate ideas stated as facts are that:
    1. Sometimes the abuse occurred because it was the child's FAULT.
    2. Getting revenge on your perpetrator is acceptable behavior, considering what they did to you. (However, the desire or FEELING of wanting revenge is normal.)
    3. Misrepresentation of what ASCA is about, how it operates, or who it serves.
    4. Ideas that sound wrong or questionable. Co-facilitators can tag this by saying that there is some controversy about whether that is true or not.
- Examples of how to challenge inappropriate ideas stated as facts:

    📖 "I want to make one clarification about a comment that was just made. Most experts in the field do not believe it is EVER the child's fault that they were abused. Children do not have the necessary judgment or interpersonal power to make an informed decision like that."
- Example of how to respond to inappropriate or dangerous plans:

    📖 "Excuse me. You're talking about doing something that could easily turn violent or dangerous to yourself or the offender. Also, we don't want others to get the idea that violence is a solution. It's also against our guidelines."

7.4.6 PERPETRATOR-TYPE BEHAVIOR OR INTENTIONS

We can expect that some perpetrators may be attracted to ASCA and want to participate out of some particular motivation—healthy or not.

ASCA wants to help survivors understand their past, which may include aggressive or abusive feelings. If the perpetrator is a survivor and is in the process of feeling the pain and recovering memories of the victimization as a child and can control their aggression toward others, then the meetings should be open to them. However, they must attend to survivor issues while in ASCA and **not address perpetration**. ASCA is **not** a program to help perpetrators get control of their abusive behavior.

ASCA is an appropriate place to express feelings and thoughts about one's anger and aggression. The difference from the perpetrator issue raised above is that the focus is on the **thought or feeling** about the anger and aggressive impulses, **not on acting out those impulses.**

Most survivors have strong anger and aggression due to their particular form of abuse. Part of recovery is trying to resolve or "neutralize" the enormous charge left over from the trauma. Anger is a feeling that we must integrate into our emotional range and draw from when personal boundary and safety issues arise.

Your challenge will be to distinguish between perpetrator behavior and a survivor's thoughts or feelings about anger and aggression.

Examples of perpetrator behavior are:

- Talking about hurting someone or abusing someone—**stated as a plan or intention.**
- Making a reference to abusing someone else in the past (especially if the person does not seem to recognize their behavior as a form of abuse and does not express both remorse and responsibility for stopping the behavior).
- Talking about getting revenge or confronting an abuser in an overly aggressive, risky, or potentially violent manner.
- Encouraging others to "act out" aggressively in some manner.
- Referring to someone outside the meeting with a derogatory name, such as "babe", "chick", "queen", "dyke", "faggot", or any racial or ethnic slur.

What you can say when you hear the above is:

- 🕮 “Excuse me. What you’re talking about here is causing me some concern. Are you talking about actually beating up the person, or are you just expressing the fantasy of doing it?”
- 🕮 Excuse me but we don’t talk about past, present, or future perpetrator-type behavior. Please refer to Guideline #6 in your welcome to ASCA Meetings handout.
- 🕮 “Let me interrupt for just a second. What you are saying might be interpreted as perpetrator behavior. ASCA does not support using aggressive or violent means to resolve a confrontation (or take some action around the abuse). We have a guideline against perpetrator behavior.”
- 🕮 “Excuse me. The tone of voice you are using sounds overly aggressive. We need this to be a safe place for survivors, and the way you are addressing us doesn’t feel safe. Could you please stop? You and I can talk after the meeting about this more, but it just isn’t the right way to share here in this meeting.”
- 🕮 “Excuse me, _____, perhaps you are feeling anger and rage at what was done to you when you used that derogatory word, but we have a strict guideline (#7) against using derogatory language. We respect each other in this room, and that type of reference is disrespectful. You and I can talk after the meeting about this more, but it just isn’t the right way to share here in this meeting.”
- 🕮 “Excuse me. You are scaring people here with your behavior. Could you please stop it now or leave the meeting?”

  NOTE: If a person does not stop their disruptive behavior, be ready to contact building security or remove them from the online meeting.

- Examples of SURVIVOR THOUGHTS AND FEELING about anger and aggression issues, which DO NOT need intervention:
  1. “I feel so angry and enraged. It takes over my whole body. I just let myself feel it, and then it subsides a bit. I try to write about it in my journal and do some drawing. I have some fantasies of what I’d like to do to him—like string him up and torture him—but I’d never really do it.”
  2. “There are times when I can feel my father’s offender part in me well up. I can come so close to acting on it. I think it would feel really good to make someone else feel the way I did as a kid. In

fact, when I was younger, I didn't always have control over this part. I acted on it. And it didn't feel good. I felt like I had become HIM, and that made me sick. Whenever I feel that part come up inside me, I remember that sick feeling, and it helps me to get control. I am different from him, and I want to keep it that way."

8.0 Managing Personal Reactions

8.1 Balancing Recovery Needs With Co-facilitator Responsibilities

Being a co-facilitator means taking on service responsibilities in addition to dealing with your own recovery. This means you need to be able to manage your recovery reactions in the meeting well enough to perform your co-facilitator duties.

Please do not think that being a co-facilitator means you cannot be a survivor. You are a survivor who is also a leader. The best strategy is to take care of yourself by attending other ASCA meetings as a participant and by going to therapy or other self-help activities. The better you continue to take care of your own recovery needs, the easier it will be to perform your co-facilitator responsibilities.

In the space below, write about any unresolved recovery needs you may have. How do you plan to continue to work on these issues while performing co-facilitator duties?

8.2 When to Shift from Co-facilitator Role to Personal Recovery

It is important for co-facilitators to also address their own recovery needs during the meeting. Co-facilitators are welcome to share in either the longer speaker share or in the shorter “tag” shares. It is often powerful in meetings to hear a survivor share when that person is also performing co-facilitator duties. Think of the implications for the witnessing survivor! You are modeling how a peer can be competent at leading others in a compassionate way while also revealing their personal feelings and receiving support from others.

Co-facilitators have a powerful opportunity to model:

- How to be both strong and vulnerable
- How to blend healthy authority with self-respectful recovery work

In the space below, describe the kind of topics you may want to share n a meeting that you are co-facilitating:

8.3 Not Getting Triggered by Others' Stories

Sitting, as a co-facilitator and listening to survivors' shares will also bring up your own recovery issues. Like anyone else, you too will be moved by what you hear. What can you do to not get "triggered" in detrimental ways? First, accept that you **will** be triggered to some extent. The questions are:

1. How strong will your reaction be?
2. What can you do to manage it?

You want to avoid getting triggered to such an extent that you cannot carry on your co-facilitator duties.

Know what your trigger points are, and create a way of facing the feelings when they come up in a meeting. If something triggers you for the first time, try writing it down immediately and returning to your notes later. Then try to refocus yourself on the task of being a co-facilitator. Usually, returning to a more "in your head" focus will reduce your strong feelings after a few minutes.

If your reaction is unmanageable, you can also tell your fellow co-facilitator that you need them to read your next section of the script. You can do this via the private "chat" feature, if the meeting is virtual. If you are co-facilitating an in-person meeting, you can leave the room temporarily (after telling your co-facilitator what is happening). You can go outside for a few minutes until you compose yourself. Try taking some "4-Box "deep breaths: 1) Breathe in slowly and deeply for 4 counts; 2) Hold for 4 counts; 3) Exhale slowly for 4 counts; 4) Hold for 4 counts.

In the space below, write down the types of content you hear in a meeting that might trigger some strong personal reactions:

8.4 Knowing When You Need Help and Asking for It

One responsibility you have as a co-facilitator is to recognize when you need help and then ask for it. Maybe you need more training or support to handle specific situations. You can ask for help from your partner co-facilitator, your service council (if you have one in your area), or The Morris Center.

Maybe you are going through a particularly difficult stretch in recovery or life that makes it especially hard to continue. Talk with someone about it. Don't isolate yourself or hide your concerns. This is where your recovery dovetails with the responsibilities of being a co-facilitator. If you ever feel you cannot handle the co-facilitator duties, let your co-facilitator know you must step down as a co-facilitator. You can take a break on a temporary or permanent basis. Service work in ASCA does NOT mean you should do something that you feel you cannot do.

Only you can determine when you cannot handle the responsibilities of running meetings. This means being in touch with how you feel about giving service. And if you feel overwhelmed, overburdened, or too emotionally reactive to function the way you would like, take a break until things ease up. Many survivors move in and out of service responsibilities, depending on their current situation.

What happens if others (e.g., your co-facilitator) tell you that you don't seem to be handling the responsibilities of being a co-facilitator and that you need help? What do you do then? First, listen to the person's concerns. Discuss your thoughts and feelings about what the person said. Try to come to a decision that is acceptable to all parties. It may be best (for the group and for yourself) if you give yourself the benefit of the doubt by taking a break before resuming your service at another time. Try not to belittle yourself if you cannot give service right now. This is a time for you to put your own interests first.

In the space below, write down some signs that might indicate to you that you are having difficulty handling your co-facilitator responsibilities.

8.5 Handling Anxiety in a Healthy Way

Expect some anxiety about being a co-facilitator and running a meeting—especially when you first start out. The key challenge is to learn how to deal with the anxiety when it comes up before the meeting or during the meeting. Instead of avoiding it, try doing something about it.

8.5.1 Recognize that all challenges have some risk.

8.5.2 Learn a relaxation exercise to calm your anxiety, such as slowly breathing deeply using the 4-Box method (described in Section 8.3). Remember your vision of the kind of co-facilitator you want to be. Keep doing this for as long as it takes to calm down.

You can also carry around a personal affirmation.

Example: “I am strong and take good care of myself. I remember to breathe. I send love to my fears. My fears are the places within me that await my love.”

Write your own personal affirmation in the space below.

8.5.3 Verbally reassure yourself by sharing your concerns with others and accepting the support that comes back to you. Try to simply do your best and let go of some of your fears (e.g., needing to be perfect, etc.).

In the space below, write down some of your own methods for dealing with anxiety:

8.6 The following space is for writing down any reactions that may come up for you, as a co-facilitator, during an ASCA meeting or during the ASCA Co-facilitator training. Just jot down your reactions and return to these notes after the meeting is over.

9.0 Organizational Overview of ASCA: Roles, Responsibilities, and Opportunities

9.1 Local meetings

9.1.1 Discuss and resolve routine procedural meeting issues.

9.1.2 Promote meeting development.

9.1.3 Provide feedback to your regional service council (if you have one) and to The Morris Center via:

- Co-facilitators
- ASCA Newsletter Editor
- E-mail to The Morris Center, info@ascasupport.org

9.2 Meeting Co-facilitators

9.2.1 Facilitate meetings.

9.2.2 Responsible for overall health and safety of meetings.

9.2.3 Identify potential co-facilitators and encourage them to attend training.

9.2.4 Ensure that there are always trained co-facilitators ready to relieve or step in.

9.2.5 Implement routine meeting procedures:

- Copy blank phone lists (for in-person meetings)
- Maintain bookkeeping
- Maintain meeting materials and supplies
- Develop an area-specific community resource and referral list
- Conduct regular business meetings

9.2.6 Serve on a regional service council (or help create a service council if you have more than one ASCA meeting in your local geographic area).

9.2.7 Give feedback on meeting issues to your service council (if one exists in geographic area).

9.3 Regional Service Councils

9.3.1 Serve as co-facilitators on a rotating basis.

9.3.2 Promote and establish meetings in the county or region.

9.3.3 Recruit participants, potential co-facilitators, and other volunteers.

9.3.4 Monitor meeting progress in the county or region.

9.3.5 Develop a community resource list for all regional meetings.

9.4 The Morris Center Board of Directors

9.4.1 Develop and sustain the ASCA program.

9.4.2 Modify and update ASCA format, materials, and literature.

9.4.3 Seek input and feedback from meeting co-facilitators and service councils on the development and expansion of the ASCA program.

9.4.4 Serve on and oversee ASCA program subcommittees as needed.

10.0 Co-facilitator Guidelines

10.1 Time Issues

10.1.1 Start the meeting promptly at the designated time, regardless of how many people are in attendance.

10.1.2 Limit speakers to the time limits.

10.1.3 Limit discussion shares to the time limits.

10.1.4 End the meeting at the designated time.

10.1.5 Co-facilitators should support each other on the obligations of time frames.

- 🕮 For example, if a speaker ignores the timekeeper's time signal, the co-facilitator can say, "We're now out of time; please wrap it up in the next few minutes," etc. (See Section 7.4.1.)
- 🕮 If the speaker continues, try saying, "We really need to stop now; how about continuing your share at a future meeting?" (See Section 7.4.1.)

10.2 Adhering to the Format

10.2.1 Your main task as co-facilitator is to run a good, "clean" meeting, which means following the format and script as much as possible.

10.2.2 Adhere to the meeting format and script unless unusual circumstances require you to make a change.

10.2.3 The meeting format serves as a "holding" container for powerful feelings. A consistent, predictable meeting structure provides a sense of safety for participants.

10.2.4 Survivors need to feel comfortable and safe in order to face the material we hear and talk about in our meetings.

10.3 Respecting Silences

10.3.1 People are typically uncomfortable being in a group that is silent. But don't worry if it happens.

10.3.2 Let the silence just happen. Stay with the process, even if you feel somewhat uncomfortable.

10.3.3 Silence can create powerful moments of reflection for participants. Silence gives people a chance to collect themselves, reflect on what they are feeling, and determine if they have something they want to share.

10.3.4 The silence probably won't last longer than five or ten minutes. The first person to talk will probably offer a deeper and more powerful share.

10.3.5 Silence serves to deepen what people can feel and eventually say.

10.4 Difficult or Unexpected Situations

10.4.1 Please refer to Section 7.4 on Format Challenges and Section 4.5 on Communication.

10.5 Items Not Covered

10.5.1 If it becomes clear that unforeseen circumstances require you to make a temporary change in how the meeting will be conducted that day, the co-facilitators should decide how to make such a change.

- For example, if the room or building is unusable for some reason, you need to make alternative plans for where to meet.
- Another example is if one of the speakers doesn't show up for the meeting. The two co-facilitators must decide if one of them is willing to speak or whether to extend the tag-share part of the meeting. If they decide to do the latter, when they get to that part of the script, they would say, "Since we do not have a speaker today, we will jump ahead to the tag share part of the meeting"

10.5.4 **If a change is necessary, you should announce it at the beginning of the meeting and explain the change**. Try to keep the explanation simple and low-key so that the meeting can proceed in as normal a way as possible.

10.5.5 In general, **if a situation comes up that we have not yet considered, the guiding principle is to keep the solution as close as possible to the regular ASCA meeting format.**

Just make the best decision you can, **and remember to debrief after the meeting with your co-facilitator**. Also, if appropriate, discuss the situation at your next business meeting.

10.6 Phone Contacts and Email

10.6.1 A telephone call or email is often a person's first link to a self-help group. Initial contact can encourage them to explore attending ASCA by connecting with a "real" person who knows how they feel.

10.6.2 Tips on How to Handle Phone and Email Contacts

- Be sensitive to the person's feelings.
- Find out specifically what the person hopes to get from the ASCA meeting
- Don't push people to come to a meeting if they are not ready.

- Use a gentle tone and try to put the person at ease.
- If talking on the phone, talk slowly, quietly, and calmly.

10.6.2 If the Person Is Ready to Come to a Meeting

- Encourage the person to come if they are ready.
- Give information about the time, place, and type of meeting you're offering (closed, open, mostly women/men, etc.)

10.6.3 How to Help Ease the Fears and Anxiety

- Describe what happens in the group and some of the rules.
- If your meeting is in person, offer to meet the person before the meeting and introduce them to others.
- Have emergency phone numbers available (crisis hotlines, counseling services, etc.) as an alternative if the person seems to need emergency services.
- **Unless you have actually been through what the person is describing, don't say, "I know how you feel."**
- If you want and feel comfortable, spend some time disclosing your own feelings and experiences in recovery to the person.
- Encourage the person to tap into their existing network for additional support (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, doctor, therapist, etc.).

10.6.4 Setting Boundaries with the Person

- Work at being patient but also constructive and assertive with people who talk too long or who call when you are unable to talk.
- If the person calls at an inconvenient time, let them know that you are really interested in talking and would be happy to call back, or ask when they can call back.
- If your time is limited, say gently, "I have about ten minutes now. If we don't finish, what are some good times to reach you?" Follow through on what you say you will do.
- If someone starts to repeat themselves, you can say, "Can we hold that for the whole group to hear? What you are saying is important, and the whole group will want to hear it."
- KNOW THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS. We may want to make things better for others and may feel helpless if we can't. Sometimes it's good just to listen and let the caller know you are interested.

10.6.5 After a difficult interaction, it may be helpful to reach out to your fellow co-facilitator for support.

10.7 How to Conduct Business Meetings

Business meetings are the place to accomplish all non-recovery work that supports the continued functioning of the meeting. The business meeting

is necessary because, at its core, ASCA is a volunteer self-help group that cannot function without the active involvement of its membership.

The Morris Center's responsibility is to provide program ideas, models, training, and materials. It is the meeting participants' responsibility to make sure the meeting is self-supporting and sustains itself.

10.7.1 Business meetings are the place to talk about:

- How the meetings are run
- Making necessary decisions that are within the meeting's sphere of responsibilities
- Addressing group dissatisfactions and particular problem situations that may arise out of the meetings

10.7.2 Call a business meeting on a regular basis, preferably once a month or when issues or decisions indicate the need for a business meeting.

10.7.3 At least two weeks before the next business meeting and a week thereafter, make an announcement during the announcements portion of the meeting about the date and time of the next business meeting.

10.7.4 Generally, the best time to have a business meeting is immediately after an ASCA recovery meeting.

10.7.5 The co-facilitators should prepare a preliminary agenda at least a few days before the business meeting.

10.7.6 How to Conduct the Business Meeting

- Before the meeting, decide who will serve in the meeting as co-facilitator-1 and co-facilitator-2.
- Co-facilitator-1 calls the meeting to order.
- Co-facilitator-1 asks if there are any items to add to the agenda, which the co-facilitators have created.
- Discuss each item in order of priority.
- Everyone who wants to talk is given a chance to have their say.
- When the co-facilitators sense that the group is moving towards consensus, "close" the discussion process by proposing the group make a decision or, if appropriate, take a vote on a proposal.
- Co-facilitator-2 summarizes all decisions prior to adjourning the meeting.
- Business meetings should last no longer than one hour. If a meeting goes beyond that, consider tabling whatever issue is causing the time delay until the next meeting.
- Co-facilitators should conduct the business meetings in a style that follows the recommendations made in Section 4.4 on Leadership and Teamwork and Section 4.5 on Communication.

10.7.7 The co-facilitators have the responsibility of implementing whatever decisions are made in the business meeting.

- **Write down all decisions** you made in the meeting for reference by future co-facilitators.
- **Document these decisions in a set of meeting records, which you will pass on to the next co-facilitator team along with the financial bookkeeping.**

10.8 Meeting Checklist of Duties

See “ASCA Co-facilitator’s Meeting Checklist of Duties” in the “ASCA Co-facilitator Toolkit.”

11.0 Meeting Development Ideas

11.1 The Challenge of Meeting Development

11.1.1 ASCA meetings need to grow and ”thrive” in order to ensure survival.

11.1.2 The minimum number of participants for a healthy meeting is 8, including two co-facilitators, although 10 or 12 is even better. The co-facilitator roles should be a shared responsibility. If a meeting is small, the same people may feel obligated to take on that responsibility without any relief.

11.1.3 ASCA meetings need to build up their attendance in order to develop future co-facilitators, service council members, and mentors for future co-facilitator training..

11.1.4 Most importantly, larger meetings have ”vitality” and provide more diverse recovery experiences for meeting participants. Think of every participant as a “resource”—the more resources at a meeting, the more beneficial it can be.

11.2 Growing a Meeting Is a Leadership Challenge

11.2.1 Developing a meeting gives co-facilitators the chance to practice leadership skills by encouraging involvement of others, delegating tasks, asking participants to help out, identifying those interested in providing service, and brainstorming with others about how to grow the meeting and then implement those strategies.

11.2.2 If you have a particularly effective idea, please let your service council in your region (if you have one) and The Morris Center Board of Directors know about it. We will want to include it in future updates of this manual.

11.3 Meeting Development Strategies

11.3.1 Use the announcements portion of each meeting to encourage participants to reach out to other survivors in the community to attend ASCA. Use the talents of your meeting participants to spread the word.

11.3.2 Make a special connection with newcomers before and/or after each meeting by introducing yourself, referring them to ASCA literature, and inviting them back next week.

11.3.3 Recruit regular members to take the co-facilitator training so you will have extra back up for meetings. Always announce when the next training will be.

11.3.4 If it's an in-person meeting, ask the group to distribute flyers to locations around the city where other survivors are likely to see the flyers (e.g., twelve-step meetings, churches, universities).

11.3.5 Encourage participants who attend twelve-step meetings to promote ASCA within the twelve-step community. Emphasize that we are a separate program for a separate problem.

11.3.6 Use the time after meetings to talk up the need for developing a "core" group of participants to make the meeting their own. We want each ASCA meeting to take on the particular personality of the core members. If members come and go after a few meetings, the meeting never develops an identity—an important issue for any self-help group.

11.3.7 Talk to your co-facilitator and fellow participants about going out for coffee after the meeting or hosting "virtual cafes" so participants can socialize and decompress after meetings. NOTE: It is important that in social settings we still honor the spirit and traditions of ASCA. For example, always asking permission if someone wants to offer feedback to another person after a meeting, confidentiality, no gossip, no advice, etc.

12.0 Closing Exercise

12.1 The purpose of this closing exercise is to bring us back together as a group and offer everyone the chance to speak about what this training experience has meant. **How do you feel leaving today? What is the main thing you got out of today?**

The group will appreciate any comment that offers you a sense of closure to this training experience. You may also choose to pass the *talking stick*[4] on to the next person.

12.2 If this is an in-person training, everyone will sit or stand in a circle. One of the facilitators will go first and describe what the day has meant to them.

12.4 After the facilitator has spoken, they will pass the talking stick to the person on their right in the circle.

12.6 This will continue until everyone has shared (or passed).

12.7 The last person to share will then pass the talking stick back to the facilitator who started the process. The circle will be closed, and our day together will be complete.

Please fill out the Workshop Evaluation form and leave it for the trainers before you leave. Thank you!

[4] The *talking stick* can be a timer (which most facilitators use in the ASCA meetings) or any other object that might symbolize something meaningful to the group.

13.0 Post-training Self-assessment for Co-facilitator Readiness

Directions: After you complete the workshop and read all of the materials in this handbook, please complete this self-assessment. In the blank spaces below, write the number that best reflects how you feel about your ABILITY TO PERFORM or your UNDERSTANDING of these items. Use your self-assessment as a discussion tool with your meeting's current co-facilitators soon after you complete this workshop.

RATING SCALE:

No Confidence				Very Confident
0	1	2	3	4

INFORMATION (Organizational)

1. ____ I can explain the purpose and principles of self-help support groups.
2. ____ I can describe the philosophy, organizational structure, and administration of ASCA,

3 ____ I can describe therelationship of ASCA with The Morris Center.

3. ____ I can explain the roles of The Morris Center Board of Directors, co-facilitators, and meeting participants.
4. ____ I can create a list of local community resources for survivors.
5. ____ I can describe the co-facilitator's obligation to report child abuse.

NUTS AND BOLTS OF RUNNING ASCA MEETINGS (Organizational)

6. ____ I can describe the co-facilitator meeting tasks.
7. ____ I feel ready (with some mentoring) to perform a basic recovery meeting and business meeting administration.
8. ____ I can describe what to look for in group dynamics.
9. ____ I can explain the reason for ASCA's meeting guidelines to participants.

HANDLING DIFFICULT MEETING SITUATIONS (Interpersonal)

16. ____ I can perform basic interventions (time and crosstalk) when format challenges occur.
17. ____ I can describe how to intervene in difficult meeting situations.

18. ____ I can describe how to propose compromises to resolve conflicts.

LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK (Interpersonal)

19. ____ I can describe the basics of how to speak effectively in public.
20. ____ I have created my own image of an “ideal leader.”
21. ____ I can demonstrate healthy authority.
22. ____ I can demonstrate teamwork with others.
23. ____ I feel confident that with some practice and mentoring, I can “hold” a safe meeting.

COMMUNICATION (Interpersonal)

24. ____ I can demonstrate how to listen actively, think clearly, and respond thoughtfully to others.
25. ____ I feel confident that with some practice and mentoring, I can act assertively without being aggressive.
26. ____ I can explain the importance of communicating regularly with my co-facilitator.

MANAGING PERSONAL REACTIONS (Personal)

27. ____ I can identify how to balance recovery needs with co-facilitator responsibilities.
28. ____ I can identify what to do when I’m triggered by others’ stories.
29. ____ I can ask for help when I need it.
30. ____ I can identify strategies for how to handle anxiety in a healthy way.
31. ____ I can identify when to shift from a co-facilitator role to personal recovery in meetings.

COMPASSION/EMPATHY/SUPPORT (Personal)

32. ____ I can, with some practice and mentoring, convey compassion and empathy in words.
33. ____ I am able to respect personal and interpersonal boundaries.
34. ____ I am able to express warmth, respect, and firmness.

CONSISTENCY, RELIABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY (Personal)

35. ____ I commit to conducting a safe, predictable meeting each week.

36. ____ I take the various co-facilitator responsibilities seriously.
37. ____ I am able to stick to the ASCA meeting format as precisely as possible.
38. ____ I can function as a responsible and consistent meeting co-facilitator.
39. ____ I feel confident that I am able to maintain a consistent “presence” while running a meeting week after week.
40. ____ The Morris Center and meeting participants can rely on me to make a minimum three-month commitment to co-facilitate my support group.
41. ____ The Morris Center and meeting participants can rely on me to facilitate my support group according to the model I was taught in training.

14.0 Co-facilitator Resource and Reference List

1. The Morris Center's ASCA website: ascasupport.org

Our website is a great resource when you need additional information and tools! Here is where you can access the *ASCA Newsletter*, ASCA meeting materials (including the meeting format script, templates for signs, and handouts). You can download the *Survivor to Thriver* manual used for our Rotation B Step Meetings and Step-Work Meetings.You can also order a copy of "Soul Survivors, Second Edition" by Patrick Gannon. This book is considered by many of us in ASCA to be what the "Big Book" is to 12-Step Programs.

2. Questions or comments about The Morris Center's co-facilitator training: info@ascasupport.org

Part 2:
ASCA Co-facilitator Toolkit

Table of Contents (Part 2)

ASCA Co-facilitator's Meeting Checklist of Duties

Meeting Checklist for Co-facilitator-1

The following list serves as a **general guide** on how you might divide responsibilities equitably for each ASCA meeting. Please feel free to adjust this checklist to fit your meeting's specific needs and circumstances.

At Least Two Days Before The Meeting:

- ❑ Make contact with the other co-facilitator and agree on which role you and they will assume (co-facilitator-1 or co-facilitator-2).
- ❑ Make contact with the speakers and provide support for their upcoming share.

On Meeting Day:

- ❑ Arrive 15 minutes before the meeting is scheduled to start.
- ❑ Arrange the tables and chairs (if necessary).
- ❑ Place the "Welcome to ASCA" handouts on the table or chairs.
- ❑ If due to unforeseen circumstances, the other co-facilitator is not present 5 minutes before the meeting starts, find a volunteer (preferably someone who has gone through training) to fill in for that meeting day. Be prepared to direct the volunteer through the meeting.
- ❑ Check with co-facilitator-2 about whether you are going to get together for coffee after the meeting. If both of you are going for coffee, make an announcement to invite the group.

During The Meeting:

- ❑ Follow meeting script as indicated for co-facilitator-1.
- ❑ Pass out phone list at the beginning and close of the meeting and pick it up at the end of the meeting.
- ❑ Pass out donation basket at the end of the meeting.
- ❑ Make a standard announcement at the end of the announcements section about

  1. Publicizing the ASCA meeting in the community
  2. Recruiting for new co-facilitators
  3. Dates of upcoming co-facilitator training workshops
  4. Going out for coffee after the meeting
  5. Anything else that might help grow the meeting

After The Meeting:

- ❑ Be available to respond to questions, chat with newcomers, and offer appreciation and praise to speakers.
- ❑ Schedule future speakers.
- ❑ Make sure both you and co-facilitator-2 have updated copies of the speaker list.
- ❑ Count the donations, write the amount in the meeting ledger book, and follow bookkeeping procedures.
- ❑ After the meeting, turn off the lights and close the door, unless there are building personnel designated to do that.
- ❑ Debrief with your co-facilitator how you think the meeting went and discuss any questions or concerns

Meeting Checklist for Co-facilitator-2

The following list serves as a general guide on how to divide responsibilities equitably for each ASCA meeting. Please feel free to adjust this checklist to fit your meeting's specific needs and circumstances.

At Least Two Days Before The Meeting:

- ❑ Make contact with the other co-facilitator and agree on what role you each will assume (co-facilitator-1 or co-facilitator-2).

On Meeting Day:

- ❑ Arrive 15 minutes before the meeting is scheduled to start.
- ❑ Put up signs directing people to the meeting room.
- ❑ Ask for volunteers to read from the *Survivor to Thriver* manual (in Rotation B Step Meetings and Step-Work Meetings). Make sure they have copies of the manual from which to read.
- ❑ If no one volunteers, you and/or your co-facilitator can read.
- ❑ If the other co-facilitator is not present 5 minutes before the meeting starts, solicit for a volunteer to fill in for that meeting only (ask participants who have been trained as a co-facilitator). Be prepared to direct the volunteer throughout the meeting.
- ❑ Check with co-facilitator-1 about whether you're going to get together for coffee after the meeting.

During The Meeting:

- ❑ Follow the meeting script as indicated for co-facilitator-2.
- ❑ Keep time for speaker shares, giving the warning and time-up signals.

After The Meeting:

- ❑ Be available to respond to questions, chat with newcomers, and offer appreciation or praise to the speaker.
- ❑ Schedule future speakers.
- ❑ Make sure both you and co-facilitator-1 have updated copies of the speaker list.
- ❑ Assist in counting the donations.
- ❑ Collect the leftover handouts, and take down signs directing people to the meeting.
- ❑ Assist in closing the room and/or building.
- ❑ Debrief with your co-facilitator how you think the meeting went and discuss any questions or concerns

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Meeting Hints: Setting the Tone Before the Meeting Begins

As a co-facilitator, ASCA meeting participants often look to you to set the tone. Setting a warm and welcoming tone helps people feel comfortable and relaxed. This is especially true for new ASCA participants.

Most of us like to feel welcome. We appreciate a friendly gesture. It makes us feel like part of the group. Talking with a new participant before the meeting starts is a friendly gesture. This connection prior to the meeting might prevent a newcomer from inadvertently violating one of the meeting's guidelines. This connection might also help you later, if you need to make an intervention.

Things you might do to set the tone prior to the meeting:

- Introduce yourself to a newcomer: "Hello, my name is _____. I am one of the two co-facilitators who will be facilitating the meeting. This is our Welcome to ASCA handout. It describes how our meeting operates. If you have any questions or if you want to debrief after the meeting, please let me know."
- Say hello to a sporadic participant: "Hello, my name is _____. I am glad to see you again. Here's our meeting information and a copy of our last *ASCA Newsletter*."

Remember: These 15-second interactions could pay big dividends.

Co-facilitator Intervention Job Aid

(version date: 2/5/24)

Violation: Time Limit	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. Support each other in the imposition of time frames. 2. Intervene in a sensitive, gentle way. 3. Minimize the disruption for the speaker.	"Bill, we'd like to hear more, but we're out of time. Would you like to say one final thing?" "I'm sorry, but we're out of time. Please wrap it up in the next few minutes." "We really need to stop now. How about continuing your share at a future meeting?" ***Your own words:***

Violation: Cross-Talk	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. Speak firmly but kindly. 2. Use your best judgement on whether to interrupt the person or whether to say something when they finish.	"Excuse me, _____, I need to interrupt you for a moment. Please continue your share, but without referring to anyone in the room." "Referring to someone by name or to the content of someone else's share is cross-talk. You can talk about a theme that has come up, but just talk about it from your own perspective. We can talk about this more after our meeting. Okay? Thanks." ***(If the person looks puzzled):*** "Cross talk threatens group safety. The person referred to may feel misunderstood or misrepresented. Someone not referred to may feel overlooked or excluded." ***Your own words:*** ***(If the person looks puzzled):***

Violation: Challenge or argument about an intervention	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. Especially good if	"I hear that you feel angry and constrained by our rules.

the person wants to argue about their personal rights or needs.	But our ASCA meetings need to provide a safe place for survivors to come together and share our most vulnerable feelings. This group need **always** preempts individual need." ***Your own words:***

Violation: Excessive Profanity	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. The issue with using excessive profanity or inflammatory language is "acting out with words" rather than "using words to express anger". 2. We always want to model the latter in managing the emotional byproducts of abuse. 3. This distinction may be subtle for some ASCA meeting participants.	"Excuse me, _____, I know you are feeling anger and rage at what was done to you. But please be mindful that we have a ground rule about not using excessive profanity. Thank you for your consideration." "Excuse me. Could you please not use excessive profanity? That is not part of what we do here. It's okay to express how angry you are, but try to use words that describe your feelings rather than acting out your anger in this meeting." ***(If the person looks puzzled):*** "ASCA does not support using aggressive or violent means to resolve our abuse. That is why we have a ground rule about excessive profanity and shouting. We want to hear you and support you. So, could you address the issue by using words to express your feelings rather than acting out with words? Thank you." ***Your own words:*** ***(If the person looks puzzled:)***

Violation: Shouting	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. The issue with shouting is also about "acting out" rather than "using words to express anger". 2. We want to model the latter in managing the	"Excuse me, _____, perhaps you are feeling anger and rage at what was done to you when you raised your voice, but we have a ground rule against shouting in the group. You and I can talk about this more after the meeting, but it just isn't the right way to share here in this meeting." "Excuse me. Could you please stop shouting? You and I can talk about this more after the meeting, but shouting is against the ground rules in this meeting." ***(If the person looks puzzled:)***

emotional byproducts of the abuse.	"It looks or sounds like something might be troubling you. Could we agree to discuss this after the meeting is over?" ***(If the person resists or becomes belligerent with you, say***:) "Excuse me. We need this to be a safe place, and the way you are addressing us doesn't feel safe. Could you please stop it now or leave the room? Thank you." ***Your own words:*** ***(If the person looks puzzled:)*** ***(If the person resists or becomes belligerent with you, say:)***

Violation: Psychoanalyzing or "Taking Another Person's Inventory"	
Guide	***What to Say***
	"Excuse me. Please be mindful that we have a ground rule about not psychoanalyzing another person's share. It's okay to talk about your feelings of admiration or respect in response to a person's share. But we believe that everyone is their own expert on what their experience means for them. You and I can talk about this more after the meeting, if you like. Thank you." ***Your own words:***

Violation: Using "You" Language vs. "I" Language	
Guide	***What to Say***
	"Hi _____. Just a friendly reminder to try and stick with 'I' language vs. 'You' language. We want to keep the focus in our meetings on ourselves whenever we share, rather than projecting our opinions, feelings, or thoughts onto others. This is an important aspect of our individual recovery work, so we have included it in our ground rules to keep our ASCA meetings feeling supportive and

	psychologically safe." ***Your own words:***

Violation: Criticizing/Belittling/Teasing	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. This issue is about "acting out" in abusive "perpetrator" types of behavior. 2. The "bottom line" for being able to participate in our meetings is always about safety and support; belittling, attacking, or teasing someone in the group violates this bottom line.	"Excuse me, _____, but we have a strict ground rule against criticizing, belittling, attacking, or teasing anyone in the group. We need to respect each other's vulnerability in this room and support each other. Even something said "in fun" can hurt someone. You and I can talk about this more after the meeting, but it just isn't the right way to share here in this meeting." ***(If the person resists or becomes belligerent with you, say:)*** "It looks or sounds like something might be troubling you. Could we agree to discuss this after the meeting is over?" "Excuse me. Could you please stop it now or leave the room? Thank you." ***Your own words:*** ***(If the person resists or becomes belligerent with you, say:)***

Violation: Interrupting or Disrupting	
Guide	***What to Say***
	"Excuse me, _____has the floor for their share now. Let's try to stay with the format listed in the handout. If you'd like, you can raise your hand after their share to be 'tagged' for the next share." "Excuse me. Could you please stop disrupting the meeting or else leave the room? If you like, we can talk about this after the meeting. Thank you." ***Your own words:***

Violation: Guideline #6: Perpetrator Behavior	
Guide	***What to Say***

1. ASCA meetings are not for everyone. 2. There are other programs that focus on impulse control, anger management, aggression fantasies, and 'nothing too heavy to share'.	"Excuse me, but we need to ask you to stop. Your share crosses Guideline 6. In ASCA meetings, we work on our recovery by focusing on what was done to us and how we are trying to move on with our lives. If you like, we can talk some more after this meeting." ***(If the person is advocating violence or talking about a plan to hurt someone, interrupt and say:)*** "Excuse me. What you're talking about here is causing me some concern. Are you talking about actually doing this, or are you just expressing the fantasy of doing it? In ASCA, we draw a line between expressing how we feel and actually acting out our anger." ***Your own words:*** ***(If the person is advocating violence or talking about a plan to hurt someone, interrupt and say:)***

Violation: Guideline #7: Derogatory Language	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. In ASCA, we draw a line between expressing how we feel and actually acting out our anger.	"Excuse me, _____, perhaps you are feeling angry at what was done to you, but we have a strict guideline against using derogatory language. We respect each other in this room, and that type of reference feels disrespectful. You and I can talk about this more after the meeting, but it just isn't the right way to share here in this meeting." ***Your own words:***

Violation: Inappropriate ideas stated as facts	
Guide	***What to Say***
1. Decide whether you can wait until the "educational moment" in a meeting or should interrupt the speaker.	"I want to make a clarification about a comment that was made. Most experts in the field do not believe it is EVER the child's fault that she was abused. Children do not have the necessary judgement or interpersonal power to make an informed decision like that." ***Your own words:***

Disinviting an ASCA Participant from Meetings

Under certain extreme conditions, the co-facilitators, in conjunction with the meeting membership, have the option, authority, and responsibility to prohibit a survivor from participating in ASCA meetings. **This has happened only a few times since 1993.** It is a strong and decisive action taken by the co-facilitators and meeting membership to guarantee the ongoing safety of the group.

Typically, in less egregious breaches of ASCA rules, an immediate intervention will be sufficient to change behavior, but, in some cases, even prolonged interventions do not cause behavioral changes.

What are some of the behaviors that might require a disinvitation?

1. **During the meeting:**
    a) Current perpetrator behavior or suspicion of current perpetrator behavior
    b) Constantly disrupting the meeting or prolonged disruptions that do not respond to interventions
    c) Belligerent or threatening behavior
    d) Belittling, gossiping inside or outside of the meeting
    e) Unwanted romantic or personal advances, including misuse of the telephone list
2. **Outside the meeting:**
    a) Gossiping, breaking confidentiality, and demonstrating disrespect (gossip includes talking about other people's experiences and shares)
    b) Continuous, unwanted advice
    c) Taking advantage of other members, e.g., financially, time
    d) Unwanted romantic advances—"hitting on" a meeting member

Discussion:

1. **The individual refuses to observe the meeting guidelines.** If, after repeated interventions, a person continues to break the meeting guidelines, you may need to ask the person to not attend future meetings. In the past, this happened when a survivor also happened to be a perpetrator. The person had a need to discuss issues and personal dynamics connected with perpetrating abuse on others. The person was seeking help while repeatedly crossing Guideline 6.

    ASCA is a program for survivors of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or neglect. ASCA is not a program to assist people with their perpetration issues

and behaviors. If a person is presently perpetrating abuse on a child or teenager or has in the recent past, they are not an appropriate candidate for ASCA. Such a person needs assistance that ASCA is not designed to offer. Refer this person to another appropriate program where they can receive the necessary help.

2. **The person is taking advantage of the meeting or taking advantage of some of its members.** The second condition is more difficult to articulate. It pertains to an ASCA participant who, in the big picture, is perpetrating a type of abuse. The person might be consistently sharing in a manner that is offensive and/or antagonistic to other members. Their shares appear to many people within the group to be more in the service of titillating and harassing than dealing with and focusing on past abuse. One way to confirm this dynamic is when many members report the same negative reaction to this person's shares over a reasonable time interval. If, after talking to the person about this issue, the person does not change their manner of sharing, you may need to ask the person not to attend future meetings.
3. **The person is harassing (a) member(s) of the group.** Another situation involves a participant harassing members of the group, maybe for dating purposes. The person's boundaries are poor. The person may be taking advantage of the vulnerability of group members. The person may try to ingratiate themselves with a member of the group, then try to take advantage of them.

When any of the above difficult situations occur in the meeting, the co-facilitators should check out and discuss the situation between themselves and with other senior members of the ASCA meeting. To help clarify, gain perspective, and strategize possible interventions, the co-facilitators can contact The Morris Center Board of Directors and discuss the situation. The board can be a wonderful resource and helpful ally in such situations.

Co-facilitators always have the authority to ask a participant to leave a meeting at any time. To enact the process of prohibiting the person from future ASCA meetings, take the meeting membership into counsel through a business meeting. When you officially disinvite a person from attending ASCA meetings, you should give the person other local resources that might be useful. Inform the person that if they try to attend an ASCA meeting in the future, you will immediately call the police to have the person removed. This is the standard procedure: *no ifs, ands, or buts.*

Authority

Where does authority come from in a self-help group—including the ability to lead a meeting, enforce ground rules, have a budget, and collect money for the meeting's treasury?

Authority comes from the group itself. The meeting belongs to the members of the group. Each individual member willingly concedes a portion of their individual authority to the current co-facilitators so that they can maintain safety and support for all concerned. There is an expectation that honoring the co-facilitators' enforcement of group rules will be beneficial to everyone.

The Morris Center provides safety guidelines and recommendations to ASCA co-facilitators in the form of written literature and global training. The recommendations were produced by mental health professionals who are experts in the field of recovering from childhood abuse—in collaboration with a leadership council of veteran survivors. Since its inception, The Morris Center has refined its recommendations based on real-world ASCA meeting experience and results.

See also authority *in "Defining Self-help Mutual Support Groups" in the ASCA Meeting Toolkit.*

Disinvitation Process

What is the process for disinviting someone?

- Describe the ground rule or guidelines the person is breaking, tell the person what they need to do in order to correct their behavior, and inform them of the consequences of continuing their current behavior.
- Give the person the choice to change their behavior.
- Some people get under the co-facilitators' skins, so it's **important to separate personal irritation from disruptive behavior.**

Does the group need to be informed?

- Often, the best place is in the business meeting.
    - Present the process to the group. Describe the behavior and the warning process. Let members know that this is a thoughtful decision.
    - Respond to questions that other members ask.
- Don't tell when it is not really noticeable, for example, if a person was disinvited following their first meeting.
- The meeting co-facilitators should ask themselves what level of disclosure is least detrimental to the group. Sometimes talking about disinviting a member may stir up concerns that are not relevant.
- Balance transparency and responsibility with the need for safety and support.

Do the co-facilitators consult the group?

There are valid considerations for both sides of this question. In the final analysis, the decision may be situation-dependent. What you see below are discussion points that advocate for and against consulting the group. We think considering these questions will assist in making the best decision possible.

- Yes—for information-gathering purposes only. This is the decision of the co-facilitators.
- No—consultation can engender alliance building and strife within the group. Sometimes, it's just best to make a decision and stick to it.

There are two kinds of meetings: 1) provider-based, even if the co-facilitators are not licensed therapists; and 2) community-based, where the group is more participatory and determining leadership is often a democratic process. *(See these definitions in "Defining Self-help Mutual Support Groups" in the ASCA Meeting Toolkit.)*

If a group thinks that someone should be disinvited and a vote is to be taken, some aspects of the sense of safety may be lost. People come to the meeting for recovery and may feel deeply ambivalent about voting. It may feel like an unfair process and that the co-facilitators are shirking responsibility for it. The **co-facilitators are ultimately responsible for maintaining safety and support in the group.** Voting can create—or add to—the gossiping, discord, and ambivalence in a group. A recommendation is to neither consult the group nor hold a group vote because it creates unease ("dis-ease") and discomfort.

Scripts

Please see the "Disinvitation Scripts" following this article.

Flowchart

Please see the "Dis-invitation Process Flow" chart following this article.

Feelings

What feelings might the co-facilitators have?

- Anger or resentment—for being put in a difficult position
- Anxiety
- Fear of receiving an aggressive and violent response
- Guilt
- Impatience—wanting to get it done
- Loathing
- Power and or strength
- Relief
- Sadness for the participant being disinvited
- Sympathy

Feelings of other ASCA meeting participants?

- Ambivalence
- Concerns—am I going to be disinvited or will I be the next one to be disinvited?
- Guilt—what did I do to aid in this, did I so something wrong?
- Incompleteness—not knowing the whole story
- Relief
- Worry

Feelings of person being disinvited?

- Anger
- Betrayed
- Confusion—not understanding
- Discarded
- Failure
- Grief
- Hopelessness
- Like a scapegoat
- Loss
- Persecuted
- Rejected
- Unworthy
- Vengeful

Reflection

Reflect on your process **three months to one year** following the disinvitation to see if you would do anything differently and to determine if you would allow the person back to the group after a period of time.

Summary

The process of disinviting someone from a meeting is **a rare occurrence.** Most ASCA meetings are open to the public. So, occasionally, a person who is not an appropriate candidate for ASCA may appear in your meeting. Although the process of barring someone from your meetings may raise anxiety, fears, and other distressing feelings for you, it is also an opportunity to practice assertiveness, firmness, compassion, and courage! It is an opportunity to practice teamwork and collaboration. It is an invitation to stretch and grow.

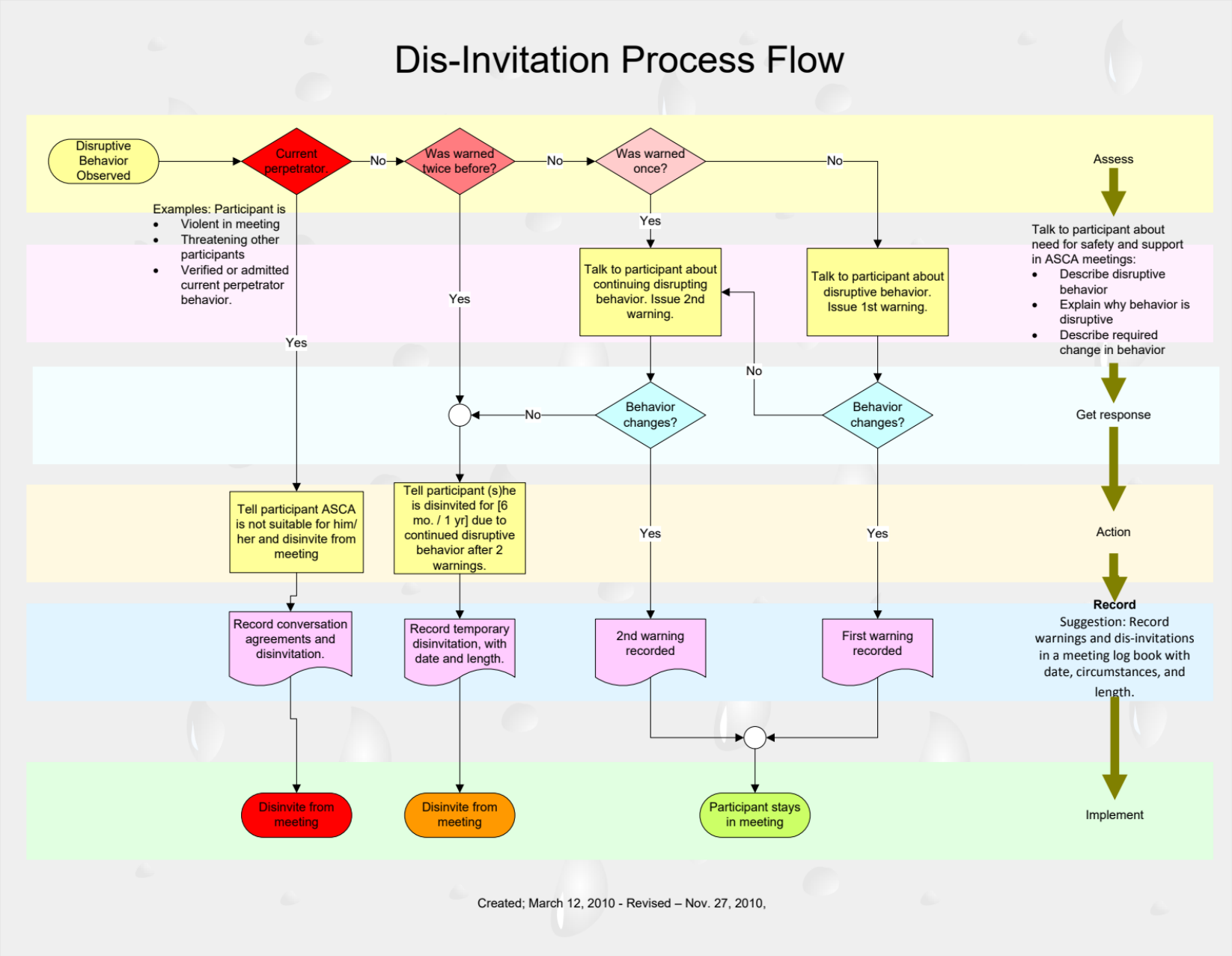
We hope that we have helped to clarify this often uncomfortable process. If you follow the procedures thoroughly and thoughtfully, you will be doing the right thing for the group.

Disinvitation Scripts

These scripts accompany the “Disinviting an ASCA Participant from Meetings” article. Remember, disinvitation is a rare occurrence, so these scripts may help in the process.

Describe the problem behavior—what the person is doing that violates a core value.		***Tell the person what you would like them to do instead.***	***Relay the consequences if the person continues to repeat the same behavior.***
Statement	**Problem Behavior**	**Alternatives**	**Consequences**
John, today in the group, you seriously violated one of our safety guidelines.	You became argumentative when Sally asked you to wrap up your share. This discussion used up several minutes of meeting time because you continued to talk even when you were asked if we could talk about Sally’s intervention after the meeting.	If you disagree with an intervention, we would like you to follow the directions from the co-facilitators regarding the intervention and then ask to talk to the co-facilitators after the meeting. This will allow the co-facilitators to explain the intervention to you without using up valuable meeting time.	Failure to honor the requests of the co-facilitators disrupts the meeting and could lead to consequences. These consequences could include asking you to refrain from attending the meeting for a period of time up to one year in length.
Jill, I just heard you threaten Sam.	In ASCA, we do not allow violence or threats of any kind.	I am giving you my phone number so that, if you wish, we can discuss this matter later on the telephone. Also, at a later time, I can provide you with a list of resources that may be useful for you to work on controlling your anger and expressing it in appropriate ways.	For now, I am asking you to immediately leave the meeting and not come back for one year. Please contact me before attempting to return to the meeting.

Sally, today there was a problem with your behavior in the meeting.	When others were sharing, you talked several times during their shares. I was not sure if you were talking to someone, making comments to yourself, or if you realized that this behavior was disruptive to the group.	Please refrain from speaking or making any comments or noise when others are sharing. As you know, there are several times during the meeting when the co-facilitators check to see if any members would like to comment on another's share. That is the appropriate time to provide supportive feedback. Also, after the meeting is over, it is entirely appropriate to respectfully approach another member, ask them if they would like to hear your comments, and provide direct feedback. It is never okay to provide feedback unless you receive permission from the person to do so.	Talking over others' shares is a violation of group etiquette. Continuing this behavior could result in you being asked to not talk or share during the meeting or to provide feedback to group members. If the behavior continues, you could be asked to stay away from our meetings for up to one year.
* Timing is everything! It's important to provide feedback as close as possible to the actual event. We recommend that you try to catch the person right after the meeting, if possible, to have your discussion. If that is not possible, then call the person before the next meeting. If that is not possible, then the next best option would be to catch the person right before the next meeting starts.			


Dis-Invitation Process Flow
Disruptive Behavior Observed
Current perpetrator.
No
Was warned twice before?
No
Was warned once?
No
Yes
Examples: Participant is
Violent in meeting
Threatening other participants
Verified or admitted current perpetrator behavior.
Yes
Yes
Talk to participant about continuing disrupting behavior. Issue 2nd warning.
Talk to participant about disruptive behavior. Issue 1st warning.
No
No
Behavior changes?
Behavior changes?
Tell participant ASCA is not suitable for him/ her and disinvite from meeting
Tell participant (s)he is disinvited for [6 mo. / 1 yr] due to continued disruptive behavior after 2 warnings.
Yes
Yes
Record conversation agreements and disinvitation.
Record temporary disinvitation, with date and length.
2nd warning recorded
First warning recorded
Disinvite from meeting
Disinvite from meeting
Participant stays in meeting
Assess
Talk to participant about need for safety and support in ASCA meetings:
Describe disruptive behavior
Explain why behavior is disruptive
Describe required change in behavior
Get response
Action
Record
Suggestion: Record warnings and dis-invitations in a meeting log book with date, circumstances, and length.
Implement
Created; March 12, 2010 - Revised – Nov. 27, 2010,

Part 3:
ASCA Meeting Toolkit

Table of Contents (Part 3)

Defining Self-help Mutual Support Groups

As a co-facilitator of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) support groups, participants may ask you how we differ from or are similar to therapy groups, twelve-step groups, etc. Many of our new group members may have had exposure to and involvement with Survivors of Incest Anonymous (SIA), Incest Survivors Anonymous (ISA), or Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA).

New members may come with the expectation that our ASCA support groups operate similarly to twelve-step groups, the most widely known type of self-help program. However, there are many types of self-help mutual support groups. At one time, the United States Public Health Service estimated that there were more than 500,000 support groups meeting across the country on a regular basis.

Therapy Groups vs. Support Groups

The category that people most often confuse with support groups is that of *therapy groups.* Therapy groups have been a popular form of psychotherapy for nearly three decades. Because the popularity of therapy groups coincided with a leap in twelve-step attendance, many people mistakenly assume that support groups and therapy groups are essentially the same. There are some similarities—but there are also some significant defining differences.

Leadership:

- Therapy groups rely mainly on the guidance and expertise of a highly trained therapist. Members look to the therapist for help, generally paying a fee for this service.
- On the other hand, the leadership, authority, and expertise in support groups reside with their participants. Members look to each other for help. Facilitators adopt their roles on a volunteer basis.

Underlying Assumptions:

- Therapy groups are usually modeled on an assumption of “illness.” Participants, therefore, need “treatment” (in this case, group treatment), which is moderated by a therapist.
- Support groups presume that participants are fundamentally healthy and able to help themselves and each other.

Focus:

- The primary focus of therapy groups is emotional insight and growth.
- The focus of support groups can shift—from sharing emotions to exchanging information to social support—as needed.

Methodology:

- Therapy groups typically focus on examining the past and looking at "root causes" to gain intellectual insight into current dysfunctional behavior. Therapists use active interventions and controlled group dynamics as tools to achieve insight, change, and growth.
- The primary goal of support groups is social support and empowerment through unification and information. Sharing and self-disclosure among participants can lead to the by-product of emotional insight, change, and growth. However, support group facilitators only intervene as needed to maintain safety and structure within the group.

Despite these differences, remember that support groups can *be therapeutic without being therapy*.

Categories of Mutual Support Groups

We can categorize most mutual support groups according to the needs they address:

- overcoming addiction;
- overcoming crises;
- social support; and
- victim/patient support.

In ASCA, we focus our Social Support on helping fellow survivors overcome and transcend painful victimization as children. Therefore, ASCA support groups span several categories: overcoming crises, social support, and victim/patient support.

A Common Definition of Self-help Groups

In 1989, the National Network of Mutual Help Centers developed the following working definition of "self-help groups." This definition provided a valuable starting point for the development of ASCA's guidelines:

- A self-help group, or mutual support group, is a voluntary gathering of people who share common experiences or problems. Participants offer each other emotional and/or practical support based on the unique perspective only available to those who have shared these experiences.
- Self-help groups are run by and for group members. Professional providers may participate in the self-help process at the request and sanction of the group.
- Self-help includes discussion, sharing of information and experiences, and other activities that promote mutual support and empowerment.
- Self-help groups are open to people with common experiences and/or common concerns.
- Self-help groups require no fees for participation, although a nominal donation may be requested in order to cover expenses.

Principles of Self-help Mutual Support Groups

These principles distinguish self-help groups from other types of groups:

- Open, honest communication is essential to the integrity of a support group.
- Together, we can know and do more than any one of us alone. Each individual has value and can contribute to the group process.
- Each individual is the ultimate authority on their needs.
- Each of us has the ability to use our inner and outer resources. Some of us use this ability more than others.

Authority and Empowerment in Self-help Groups

These two important self-help concepts shaped ASCA's guidelines:

Authority for decision-making regarding "appropriate" problem resolutions always resides with the individual participants. We consider our collective experience to be the most powerful teacher on a topic. Although sensitive and knowledgeable professionals can make an important contribution to the support group, expertise regarding the topic is ultimately derived from the group's exploration of its members' common experiences.

Empowerment, for the individual in a support group, comes from the realization that the source of "authority" and healing resides within the participants themselves. *The primary role of the co-facilitator is to make it easier for the participants to help each other make this discovery.*

Community- and Provider-based Groups in ASCA

In ASCA, there are two kinds of meetings:

1. **Provider-based**, even if the co-facilitators are not licensed therapists
2. **Community-based**, where the group is more participatory—determining leadership is often a democratic process

Community-based groups are formed by individuals who are survivors of child abuse. During these meetings, two co-facilitators follow a script carefully designed to ensure a safe sharing environment. *Provider-based* groups, on the other hand, are usually formed by mental health providers or organizations. These meetings may or may not be co-facilitated by survivors of child abuse. In provider-based meetings, participants might pay a set fee to the meeting provider. The fee covers the meeting expenses and pays for the provider's time in organizing and facilitating the provider-based ASCA meeting.

ASCA Support Group Purpose

We can sum up the “why” of our guidelines by understanding our purpose for meeting together. We gather in a safe, caring, and supportive environment to:

- Be with others who understand and share the same challenges
- Work towards acceptance and healing of the difficult feelings, which accompany remembering, mourning and transcending the pain of our past
- Share approaches to recovery from our past and creative problem solving in our present lives
- Learn more about stopping the cycle of child abuse by healing ourselves and preventing its continuation with our own children and children’s children
- Promote research, treatment and advocacy
- Remember that laughter, taking care of ourselves and planning for the future are essential for our well-being
- Help others who are going where we have been

The Essence of How to Conduct All ASCA Meetings

- We have the right to silence and anonymity—no one has to talk.
- We agree to confidentiality—personal issues stay in the group.
- We listen carefully to what others have to say—avoid side conversations.
- We respect the group's ruling on cross-talk.
- We affirm how we feel—it's okay to cry, laugh, and express anger.
- We do not condone and cannot allow currently active perpetrators of abuse to attend our meetings.
- We affirm the co-facilitators' role to help us create a positive and supportive experience for all.
- We respect and maintain time frames for speaking and shares.
- We begin and end on time.

Meeting Guidelines (Handout)

Please remember that we all bear responsibility to keep this meeting helpful and safe.

Do:	◆ Show respect for each other and for the group ◆ Stick only to the requested feedback categories ◆ Speak about your own feelings/experience and use "I" statements ◆ Stay focused on the step or topic ◆ When in doubt, tone down your comments or ask for clarification from the co-facilitators
Don't	◆ Don't shout or use excessive profanity in the group ◆ Don't use "should" statements ◆ Don't criticize, belittle, attack, or "tease" anyone in the group ◆ Don't try to evaluate, psychoanalyze, or "take another person's inventory" ◆ Don't interrupt another speaker or have side conversations (in virtual meetings this includes side conversations in the "Chat")

In addition to our dos and don'ts, we ask that you observe the same guidelines as all ASCA meetings:

- Please join on time and remain until the conclusion of the meeting. Entering late or leaving the meeting early is disruptive to fellow participants.
- ASCA meetings are exclusively for adult survivors of physical, sexual, or emotional childhood abuse.
- This is an anonymous meeting. Only first names are used.
- What you hear today is told in confidence and should not be repeated outside this meeting.
- We ask that no one attend our meeting under the influence of alcohol or drugs, unless it is a physician-prescribed medication.
- ASCA meetings are not intended for survivors who are currently perpetrating abuse on others. Talking about past, present, or future perpetrator-type behavior is not permissible.
- Language that is considered derogatory concerning race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other minority status is unacceptable in the meeting.
- By participating in this meeting, we all agree to abide by the spirit of ASCA, our guidelines, and any interventions by the co-facilitators.

Communication Skills and Tips

These skills and tips can be useful for all ASCA meeting meeting participants.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

It is important to focus on "I" statements when talking to your partner or other survivors.

Example: Instead of saying, "You made me angry," say, "I feel angry."

WE DON'T GIVE ADVICE

Good communication in our meetings is about listening and speaking about our own experience—NOT about giving advice, even if someone specifically requests advice.

Example: Instead of saying, "You should do…" say, "When I was in a similar situation, I found it helpful to…"

MUTUAL RESPECT

Respect everyone's recovery path, no matter how strange and peculiar it may seem to us. We don't need to convert anyone to our point of view. We can, however, talk about what has been helpful for us—without judgment of the other person's ways.

LISTEN WITH AN OPEN MIND: MIRROR THE MESSAGE

This may be hard to do sometimes (especially if someone seems to be "attacking" you). But it is critical to listen with an open mind rather than immediately defend or explain ourselves. To help you do this, try to mirror what the person said after they finish speaking.

Example: Instead of saying, "I always put up the signs. Today was the first day I did not do that because I was running late!" say ,"I hear that you are angry with me because I forgot to put up the signs, and a new participant could not find our meeting room. Is that correct?"

VALIDATE AND EMPATHIZE

Whenever possible (after mirroring), try to validate or empathize with the person's feelings. You don't have to agree with the person in order to do this.

Example: "I can understand how you could come to that conclusion." Then follow it up with something to show you have at least tried to put yourself in the other person's shoes, such as: "I guess you could be feeling very frustrated with me right now and feel that I acted selfishly."

You are validating that your partner has a point of view, is not insane, and has a right to their feelings! This is the same thing we would want from them!

Listening and "feeling heard" open the door to true communication and teamwork!

ASCA Supportive Feedback Guide

(version date: 2/5/2024)

The supportive feedback practiced in ASCA meetings is unique. This guide provides help to members for developing this skill.

The primary goal of our self-help support group is social support and empowerment, which can be therapeutic. Psychological safety in a supportive space allows members to focus on healing rather than worry about what other members might say or do. If our intention during feedback is to assist another member directly, *that* help may not be welcome. We are not here to figure things out for others, advise others, or attempt to rescue each other. Rather, each of us focuses first and foremost on *our own* feelings and recovery. When we come together in that way, we are powerful.

This guide is based on experience and will evolve. It has three parts:

1. Safe Feedback
2. Unsafe Feedback
3. Grey Feedback

1. Safe Feedback

Expressing appreciation or how we feel after someone's share is healing. Just saying "thank you for your share," or simple mirroring, can feel very supportive. In general, the basic approach to safe, supportive feedback is:

1. Keep your focus on you:
    - Emphasize yourself, such as "I felt…" or "I resonated with…."
    - Do not give a mini-share about yourself or your views on recovery, etc.
2. Do not analyze the person who shared or their share:
    - Do not evaluate or judge them.
    - Do not give your impressions or opinions about them.
    - Do not give advice.

These types express gratitude, support, and empathy:

Types (safe)	**Examples**
Gratitude	• **Thank** you. • **Thank** you for your share. • **Thank** you for sharing that. • **Thank** you for being the 15-minute presenter today. • I feel **grateful** for your share. • I feel **grateful** for what you said about…. • I **appreciate** your share.
Support	• I **hear** you. • I **support** you. • I **support** you in what you are going through.
Affirm (often paired with "what you said" or "when you said")	*It often includes the words: **identify**, **relate**, **hear**, and **resonate**:* • I **resonated** with your share. • I **resonated** when I heard you say that it can take a lot of hard work for victims to transform their lives after child abuse. • I (so) **identify** with your share. • I **identified** with what you said: that recovery work can be hard but also rewarding. • I **heard** (**identified** with) you when you said you were feeling good yesterday but less so today. • I **related** to what you said: that you are the first person in your family of origin to address child abuse.
Emotion (often paired with "what you said" or "when you said")	*It often includes the words **feel** and **felt**:* • I **felt** glad when you said you were more assertive at work. • When you said you have not been feeling well the last few days, I **felt** compassion. • I **feel** sad that you had to go through all that junk. • I **feel** inspired by your share. • I **felt** inspired when you said you confronted your abuser. • I heard you say it took a lot of courage and determination to do that. I **feel** inspired by that. ***Tip 1**: The "Feelings Wheel" and "Feelings List" can be helpful. This feedback often only mirrors what the person said. You should not analyze what the person is doing or what you think they are doing.* ***Tip 2**: Using the phrase "...when I heard you say…", as in, "I felt glad when I heard you say…", helps avoid subtle evaluation.* ***Caution**: To avoid sounding evaluative, please use "I feel..." rather than "I am…." See "3. Grey Feedback" at the end.*

Types (safe)	Examples
Relate	*In a share,* relating *would be considered crosstalk, but as feedback, it is good.* • You said you were meeting with a therapist. **I am, too**. • I felt glad to hear you are practicing yoga. **I am** practicing, **too**. • I can so **relate** to what you said because **it matches my own** experiences. ***Note**: The last two are examples of the* affirm *and* emotion *types of safe feedback with added experience.* ***Caution 1**: If your statement about your experience is long, it can turn into a mini-share. It is best to keep it short.* ***Caution 2**: Avoid evaluative comments, such as, "I do that, too, and find it helpful." It's better to limit it to, "I do that, too."*
Imagine (a form of empathy)	• What you described **would have been** difficult and painful **for me**. • **I cannot imagine** going through what you experienced. • I think **I would have been** scared in that situation.
Understand (a form of empathy)	• I can really **understand** (**appreciate**) how you said you were feeling.

Putting It All Together

Feedback does not need to be complicated. It can be simple, and you may combine feedback types. Examples:

- "Thank you for your share."
- "Thank you for your share. I resonated with much of what you said. Thank you."
- "Thank you for your share. I resonated with much of what you said. I hear you and support you."

2. Unsafe Feedback

In ASCA meetings, these types of feedback can be unwelcome or perceived as patronizing by the person receiving it. A co-facilitator will intervene in these cases.

Types (unsafe)	Examples
Advice	• I think you will benefit from more assertiveness in that situation. • I think you may benefit from looking into….
Indirect Advice (can be condescending)	• I heard you say you are resentful about the past. I hope you are able to get past it. Note: The following two examples **would be okay** if the person requested "information and resources" as the type of feedback they wanted, but not okay if they requested supportive feedback only: • I could relate to feeling isolated. When I feel isolated, I come to a meeting to feel better. • I hear you about your pushy co-worker. What sometimes helps me is to hold my ground kindly but firmly.
Analysis (includes	• I see you are taking care of your inner child. • I am glad you are parenting yourself better than before.

Types (unsafe)	Examples
psychoanalysis)	• I can certainly appreciate that you are less codependent now. • I understand you have a real illness that causes these thoughts and feelings. • What I heard you say sounds like grief. • I appreciate your tenacity.
Commentary	• When you talked about assertiveness, I remembered that it is so important to (my) recovery. Assertiveness is known as the middle ground between passive and aggressive communication, and many see it as a happy medium.
Crosstalk (can establish present or future obligations, expectations, or pressure for them or others)	• Thank you for being here. • I am so glad you showed up today. • Thank you for stepping up and choosing to speak. • I keep hearing this theme today.
Evaluation	• You are so brave. • You are doing so well. • Your share was so organized and inspirational. • That sounds great. • That sounds wonderful.
Subtle evaluation (more subtle)	• I'm proud of you. • I am impressed with…. • I admire your…. • I applaud you. • That's impressive. • I celebrate your recovery. • I like the way you think. • I support the way you are handling it.
History	• I am glad to see you after you've been away for so many years. • I feel proud to see that you have been making progress. *(This is also* subtle evaluation *and* analysis*.)* • You've been attending meetings without saying anything and just listening for the last several meetings, and I'm so glad to hear you—thank you for sharing. *(This is also the* crosstalk *type of unsafe feedback.)*
Interpretation	• I think you are fulfilling your needs. • What I hear you say is something along the lines of what Albert Ellis advised. • It sounds like you were practicing assertiveness.
Inventory-taking	• I like the way you are taking care of yourself. • It sounds like you are working on assertiveness.
Mini-share	• Your share reminds me of the way I have experienced grief. I've been trying to express my emotions regularly, and sometimes, my sadness gets triggered in a group setting. • I identify with what you said about isolation. You didn't say it, but I sometimes come to a meeting to address feeling isolated. It helps me talk to someone. *(This example could also be the* indirect

Types (unsafe)	Examples
	advice *type of unsafe feedback.)* *Remember: Your feedback is for their benefit.*
New labeling (when the speaker didn't use the label)	• I appreciate that you are an alcoholic in recovery. *(This is also the* interpretation*,* psychoanalysis, *and* inventory-taking *types of unsafe feedback.)* • I value your process. *(This is also the* evaluation *type of unsafe feedback.)*
Too intimate	• You are not alone in this; I am here for you. • I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help. • You are important to me. Your life is important to me. • Tell me what I can do to help you right now. • I am here for you. We will get through this together.

3. Grey Feedback

Some types of feedback are in between safe and unsafe. They are in a grey area. Co-facilitators may not intervene, but we list these types as potentially unwelcome and inappropriate.

Types (grey)	Examples
Pity (feeling sorry for someone)	*Certainly, it can express compassion but also evaluation and pity:* • **I am sorry** you are going through that. ***Clear and successful alternative:*** *"I felt sorrow/sad, when you said…."*
I am…. (when expressing emotions)	*These statements can sound evaluative:* • **I am glad** (when you said) you are more assertive at work. • **I am inspired** by your share. ***Clear and successful alternative:*** *"I felt glad/inspired…."*
"Impressed" and "Admiration"	*These statements can sound evaluative:* • **I feel impressed** (when you said) you are using breathing techniques at work. • **I feel admiration** for what you expressed. ***Explanation****: These two statement are very close to* subtle evaluation in "2. Unsafe Feedback": *"I admire…" and "I am impressed…." It can be impossible to distinguish between expressing approval and expressing a simple feeling.* ***Clear and successful alternative:*** *"I felt inspired when you said …."*

Co-facilitator Interventions

(This is a helpful short article, which you may want to copy and make available in your meetings as a handout.)

One of the duties of a co-facilitator during an ASCA meeting is to intervene if any of the guidelines or the spirit of ASCA are being crossed, ignored, or disregarded. Co-facilitators report that intervening during a meeting is the most difficult, scary, and undesirable aspect of being a co-facilitator. It would be helpful to remember that co-facilitators do the best they can. They deserve our support, understanding, and cooperation.

There are two purposes for an intervention. The first purpose is to stop behavior that is ignoring our guidelines. The second purpose is to maintain the safety, integrity, and consistency of the meeting. Co-facilitators intervene because something seems amiss, and the co-facilitators make their best effort to rectify the situation.

Sometimes, a guideline is crossed unknowingly, and other times, a guideline is crossed on purpose, usually to provoke. The more common intervention is with a participant who is doing something unknowingly, perhaps out of ignorance of our guidelines. Sometimes, a participant may ask a question while giving a share, to which a co-facilitator responds to help clarify.

In the rare situation where a participant knowingly and purposefully violates a guideline, the situation needs to be taken seriously. The person needs to reconsider what they are doing and if ASCA is appropriate for them. ASCA meetings are not group psychotherapy (process group therapy) sessions but rather a communal support group whereby members agree to cooperate and adhere to the ASCA guidelines and to be respectful. An ASCA meeting is a place to receive and give support, not act out. A person who is not willing or capable of adhering to our ASCA guidelines and spirit is not a suitable candidate for participation in ASCA. ASCA meetings have limitations as a support program. It is not designed to deal with people who do not want to join cooperatively or who are not capable of abiding by the ASCA guidelines and format.

Co-facilitators intervene to maintain the safety, integrity, and consistency of the meetings. They do not intervene to be mean, humiliate, or scold. In these difficult situations, they do the best they can for the common good. During an ASCA meeting, the co-facilitators are the final arbiters. Co-facilitators are not perfect. It takes time to cultivate the skills of an experienced co-facilitator. So, if a co-facilitator makes an intervention, doing the best they can, we encourage participants to refrain from judgment, to cooperate, and to discuss the situation with the co-facilitators following the conclusion of the meeting.

Your ASCA meeting may want to plan a business meeting in the near future to discuss the role of the co-facilitator and interventions. Co-facilitators might describe what it feels like to intervene. Participants may describe what it feels like to be intervened on. The membership might discuss how to be supportive and cooperative during an intervention. What is usually helpful? What is usually unhelpful?

ASCA NYC Group Rules—Example

Passed on September 7, 2004 (edited)

*The New York ASCA meeting group rules were created after several business meetings. This is **only an example** and is provided in the co-facilitator manual for how you **may** want to supplement existing meeting materials with additional procedures and rules, depending on your particular group's requirements.*

Participation

1. Participants need to have attended at least eight meetings to be eligible to be a co-facilitator.
2. Participants need to have attended at least four ASCA meetings (given by ASCA NYC or some other ASCA group) to give a long share.
3. A person cannot attend a meeting without having first viewed the website or taken the "Welcome to ASCA" handout home with them to read. The purpose is to weed out people who are simply curious (but are not child abuse victims) after seeing our meeting signs in the Children's Aid Society building.

Shares

1. A participant cannot give a tag share if they have already given a long share at a meeting.
2. A participant cannot give more than one long share in any four-week period.
3. If there are no participants at the meeting who are eligible to give a long share (either due to inexperience or the four-week limitation), the long share shall be bypassed.

Meeting Structure

1. The business meeting will not have a long share. The last share must begin by 7:30 p.m. The share need not be shortened. It can be the same length as every other share in that meeting, but it must begin by 7:30 p.m. After the share, the meeting should be brought to a close in the usual manner. After a two-minute break, the business meeting will begin.
2. The last share of any meeting must begin by 7:40 p.m. The share need not be shortened. It can be the same length as every other share in that meeting, but it must begin by 7:40 p.m.

3. Tuesday meetings will rotate according to the pattern B-A-B-C. C rotation meetings will not include outside readings at this time. The meetings will consist of topics agreed upon by the group and may include reading materials published by ASCA.
4. Thursday meetings will all be A meetings.
5. Meetings will start at 6:30 p.m. sharp. Late-comers must wait until the two designated moments for allowing late entrances.

Voting

1. All long-term decisions (decisions affecting more than one meeting) will be decided by vote at the first Tuesday meeting of the month—the business meeting. These include decisions on participation rules, rotation patterns, money, meeting times, and meeting materials. The choice of reading material for C rotations will also be decided by vote at the business meeting. This includes all decisions affecting Thursday meetings.
2. All short-term decisions (those relevant only to the present meeting) need to be decided by vote. An example is whether or not to open a window.
3. Any person may make a motion for a vote if they are eligible. Co-facilitator-1 should state the motion and then ask if anyone seconds the motion or wants to discuss it. People should raise their hands to do either.
4. The co-facilitator should select people in the order in which they raise their hands.
5. If a person seconds a motion, the co-facilitator should ask if anybody wants to discuss it.
6. People should raise their hands to participate in the discussion. Comments should be kept under one minute, if possible. The co-facilitator can interrupt any person after one minute but can allow them to continue if warranted.
7. After discussion, the co-facilitator should call for the vote (if it has been seconded) by stating the matter to be voted upon and asking for all who are in favor, opposed, or abstaining. If no one raises a hand for discussion, the co-facilitator should call for the vote.
8. Similar procedures should be followed during the business meeting. A business meeting leader must be selected before the business meeting. The meeting initiator should ask for volunteers. If there is more than one volunteer and the volunteers do not defer to one person, the candidates shall choose from papers in a can, all but one of which is blank. The non-blank paper shall say “leader” on it.
9. All matters up for vote at the business meeting must be announced at least one week prior to an earlier meeting and sent out in the business meeting materials email. No motions for unannounced topics may be made at the business meeting itself. To be

put on the voting list, the issue must be proposed through a motion at an earlier meeting and seconded by another person.

10. The time for discussion of each topic at the business meeting shall be determined by dividing a half-hour (the time set aside for the business portion) by the number of pre-advertised issues. If there are five issues, each will get six minutes of time. At the end of the time, the will be a vote. The majority rules in all matters.
11. The meeting initiator may volunteer for co-facilitator duties by saying the following at the onset of the meeting: “I would like to volunteer to be co-facilitator-1. Does anybody else volunteer for this job?” If there is more than one volunteer, the assignment will be made by pulling papers from a can. The same procedure will be used for assigning the business leader.
12. Co-facilitator-1 will be the mediator for all group discussions, not including the business section of the business meetings. This includes the selection of people to speak and administration over voting.
13. Outside of the 20-second check-out at the end of the meeting, meeting participants should raise a hand before addressing the group. Co-facilitator-1 will call upon the person to speak. People should try not to blurt out motions or comments if possible. Please wait to be called upon.
14. Participants need to have attended at least eight meetings to participate in long-term votes.

Materials

1. Any materials used in educational moments must be pre-approved by the group.
2. Any materials left on the literature table must be pre-approved by the group. Thus far, only materials published by ASCA have been approved for the table. The only exception to this is the one-page listing of suicide hotlines that appears on our website.

Conduct

1. Shouting or excessive profanity is prohibited during shares or at any other time at a meeting.
2. Cross-talk, defined as reference to another person in the group or their share, is prohibited except during supportive feedback to a long share.
3. Descriptions of abuse initiated by a participant, whether past, present, or planned, are prohibited during meetings.

4. A person may not contact anybody else in the group unless the receiver of the contact is listed on the current week's support sign-up list or unless they have given express permission to be contacted even when not listed on the sheet.
5. Supportive feedback after long shares is meant for the benefit of the person who shared. The time should not be used for a mini-share. Also, it is not a time for analysis of the speaker, lecturing about the issues, or advice.
6. The segment of the meeting for tag shares should not be used for any other discussion, even if no one is volunteering to speak.
7. Outside of the 20-second check-out at the end of the meeting, meeting participants should raise a hand before addressing the group. Co-facilitator-1 will call upon the person to speak. People should try not to blurt out motions or comments if possible. Please wait to be called upon.

Overview of the Step-Work Meeting Format

The table describes each section and purpose of this type of meeting, which is different from a Rotation B Step Meeting.

SECTION	PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION	TIME
Welcome	Set the tone; explain the purpose, ground rules, guidelines, and format of the meeting.	5 min.
Check-in	Quick check-ins (round-robin style) help people feel more connected and safe. Format is 30 seconds per person. State 1) your first name only; 2) the feelings you bring with you to this meeting; and 3) what you hope to get out of meeting today. The co-facilitators start check-in and model this process.	5–10 min.
ASCA Stages & Steps	Read the ASCA Stages & Steps aloud.	5 min.
Step Reading from Manual	A volunteer reads the step for that day from the *Survivor to Thriver* manual.	5 min.
Individual Journaling, Art work, or other exercise	Purpose: Help people collect their thoughts and formulate their own ideas before going into tag shares on the step.	10 min.
Group Share [Breakout]	Note: If we have a large number of people at the meeting, we might break up into smaller groups of 6–10 people for just the group share portion of the meeting.	
Round 1: Uninterrupted "Go-Around" Group Share	Each participant who wishes to share their initial thoughts or feelings on the step does so (these *uninterrupted* shares should be kept within a 2-3 minute time frame). People can choose to pass.	18–20 min.
Round 2: Tag Shares with Feedback	**Categories of feedback allowed: 1) supportive, and 2) information and resources.** Each person has a total of 7 ½ minutes: 5 minutes for sharing their additional insights, questions, and feelings about the step, up to 2 minutes to receive feedback, and 30 seconds to say how they feel about the feedback.	45 min.
Checkout	Quick checkouts (round-robin style) help people feel some closure and hear how other people are feeling about the meeting. The format is 30 seconds per person. State 1) your feelings as we close the meeting; and 2) what one thing you got out of this meeting. The co-facilitators start the checkout and model this process.	5–10 min.

SECTION	PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION	TIME
Encouragement to Use Buddy System	Co-facilitators suggest that people “buddy up” with someone to work on the steps between meetings. **Purpose and benefit:** Working with another person on a step and checking in with each other between meetings will help us reach our goals. We get feedback and encouragement from someone who is also working on similar issues. **This is also totally voluntary**, much like the contact list. People self-select their “buddies.” There is a handout on how to do this—“ASCA Peer Support FAQ & Tips.”	1 min.
Closing	Announcements, review next week’s materials, and read ASCA Closing Statement	5 min.
	Total	**120 min.**

Part 4:
Ongoing Education Reader

The *Ongoing Education Reader*, formerly titled the *ASCA Meeting Guidebook*, provides discussion, elaboration, and interpretation of various components of the ASCA meeting format. Reviewing the following material can be helpful for co-facilitators and participants when confusion and disagreements surface concerning a particular aspect of an ASCA meeting or for ongoing education moments in ASCA meetings *(see topic #15)*.

It has been intended that material will be added continually to the reader, especially as members raise questions and ask for additional clarification.

The Morris Center
February 5, 2024

Table of Contents (Part 4)

Table of Contents

1. The Heart of the ASCA Meeting Guidelines

(This is a helpful short article, which you may want to copy and make available in your meetings as a handout.)

Our ASCA meeting format contains eight basic meeting guidelines, along with additional guidelines for sharing, feedback, closure comments, etc. Years ago, we intentionally chose the word “guidelines.” We accepted the inevitable reality that most of life, including ASCA meetings, is experienced in the gray area. Life and ASCA meetings rarely appear clear-cut and without some ambiguity. During an ASCA meeting, situations sometimes arise that require gentle unfolding and subjective interpretation within the confines of our agreed-upon and time-tested guidelines. Our guidelines are proposed to provide guidance and safety. They are not meant to be like harsh blocks of cement to impede, humiliate, or hurt.

ASCA Meeting Guidelines

1. Please arrive on time and remain until the conclusion of the meeting. Latecomers will be asked to wait outside so that speakers who are sharing are not interrupted. There are two opportunities for entry - 1) just prior to the main presenter about 10 minutes into the meeting, and 2) just prior to the share period approximately 35 minutes into the meeting. No one will be allowed in after this last time.
2. ASCA meetings are exclusively for survivors of physical, sexual, or emotional childhood abuse.
3. This is an anonymous meeting. Only first names are used.
4. What you hear today is told in confidence and should not be repeated outside this meeting.
5. We ask that no one attend our meeting under the influence of alcohol or drugs, unless the medication is prescribed by a physician.
6. ASCA meetings are not intended for survivors who are currently perpetrating abuse on others. Talking about past or present perpetrator-type behavior is not permissible.
7. Language that is considered derogatory concerning race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or other minority status is unacceptable in our meeting.

8. By participating in this meeting, we all agree to abide by the spirit of ASCA, our guidelines and any interventions by the co-facilitators.

Some of the guidelines are concrete, like #1: arriving on time; #2: meetings are exclusively for survivors; #3: only first names are used; #4: what you hear is told in confidence; or #5: don't use alcohol or drugs before a meeting. However, Guidelines #6, #7, and #8, along with the sharing and feedback guidelines, reside more within the gray area. These guidelines tend to point us in a direction rather than being concrete. They require a generous scoop of goodwill and some common sense on the part of all participants. Gentle compassion, thoughtful understanding, and an empathetic heart are usually the more important elements when interpreting a guideline.

Goodwill is assuming, taking the position, and placing our hearts in a mode of receptive willingness. Often, the person we perceive as breaking a guideline is doing the best they can. The person might be ignorant or confused about the guidelines. The participant might be overwhelmed at the moment. It does not help to get all bent out of shape over a violation or a perceived violation of a guideline. Graciously accepting the co-facilitator's flow with the situation or the co-facilitator's decision concerning the situation tends to be more helpful and in the spirit of our ASCA Guidelines than being rigid, reactive, or blowing a situation out of proportion or out of perspective.

Sometimes something will happen within an ASCA meeting which results in the person(s) feeling uncomfortable or anxious. When something happens during a meeting with which you disagree or with which you find unsettling, it would be helpful to you and to the meeting to discuss the situation with the co-facilitators following the conclusion of the meeting. Often, this kind of follow-through can clarify and rectify a situation. There is a greater probability of leaving the meeting satisfied and peaceful when you discuss difficult situations with the co-facilitators than if you simply leave the meeting upset and in a huff. Part of recovery is learning how to gently but firmly confront situations that seem unclear.

To summarize, the heart of our ASCA Guidelines is to promote helpfulness and safety. We interact and optimize our guidelines when we participate with a receptive heart and a generous scoop of goodwill.

Guideline #2: ASCA meetings are exclusively for survivors of physical, sexual or emotional childhood abuse.

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) is a support program for adult survivors of physical, sexual, or emotional childhood abuse or neglect. One of our prerequisites for attendance at ASCA meetings is self-identification as a survivor of childhood abuse. Family, partners, and friends who support us are not permitted to attend ASCA meetings unless they are also survivors of childhood abuse. Occasionally, however, a local ASCA meeting might decide to hold a special informational ASCA meeting to which family, partners, friends, or other interested individuals are invited.

Sometimes a new ASCA attendee might question whether they are truly a survivor of childhood abuse. This might transpire when the person does not have clear recollections of being sexually or physically abused. Many people only refer to childhood abuse as physical or sexual abuse and forget about emotional abuse. However, many people can readily identify patterns of childhood emotional abuse when they stop and examine their childhood history. Many people who suspect that they may have been abused sexually and/or physically begin with what they remember—a pattern of emotional abuse. Some of these people later recall being sexually and/or physically abused.

As described in our *Survivor to Thriver* manual on page 46, *emotional abuse* is defined as “a pattern of psychologically destructive interactions with a child that is characterized by five types of behaviors: rejecting, isolating, terrorizing, ignoring, and corrupting. Emotional abuse involves the use of words as weapons.” When a present or prospective ASCA participant is questioning whether or not they are a survivor of child abuse, reviewing chapter three in our *Survivor to Thriver* manual would probably be a helpful tool to assist in clarifying their situation.

Guideline #3: This is an anonymous meeting. Only first names are used.

ASCA meetings and the ASCA program follow standard guidelines concerning anonymity. Participants in ASCA have no obligation to reveal their name or anything specific about who they are. The only requirement for participation in ASCA is that we self-identify as survivors of childhood abuse: physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or neglect. During the meeting, only first names are used. Even a pseudonym is okay. Anonymity respects the boundaries of participants. We are all in various stages of recovery. Some stages and some people require more anonymity than others.

Respectful anonymity also extends beyond ASCA meetings. Participants should not contact one another unless the other person has expressly granted permission to do so outside of official meeting business, such as co-facilitators conferring with one another or with other members of the ASCA meeting group regarding ASCA meeting business. Many friendships will form between long-term ASCA members, which is a wonderful and natural evolution of being part of a long-term group. When friendships have developed, permission to contact each other is extended both implicitly and explicitly. Developing friendships does not violate anonymity.

On the other hand, ASCA has the custom of the peer support list, whereby volunteers list their name and contact information to be a support contact for the week. It is okay to contact a person who has volunteered as a support person, but only for that week. It is not okay, and it goes against the spirit of anonymity when someone retains that contact information and contacts the person several weeks later. The peer support is only active for a week. Many people do not place their name and contact information on the list every week.

It is a severe breach of anonymity when a person uses a telephone support number to try to arrange a social engagement. Although ASCA does not have any rules or guidelines concerning socializing outside of the ASCA meeting, pursuing someone for a date is not customary and should only be done if it is perfectly clear (without ambiguity) that someone desires to be contacted for a social engagement.

In the past, there have been occasions when a member has tried to pursue another member for the purposes of dating. Although we meet potential partners in a wide variety of situations, and this includes ASCA, pursuing an unwanted, unsolicited social engagement is contrary to the spirit of anonymity and the philosophy of ASCA. Many

wonderful friendships and relationships will emerge from being a part of an ASCA meeting for an extended period of time. The guideline of anonymity implies that people should be left alone unless they specifically state that they want contact outside of the meeting.

Guideline #4: What you hear today is told in confidence and should not be repeated outside this meeting.

During an ASCA meeting, we take participants into our confidence. We share a mutual expectation that people in attendance will extend reciprocal support and respect to each other. Within an ASCA meeting, we have faith and trust that members will do no harm to us. In fact, we anticipate that members will gently hold whatever we express, as they would caress a vulnerable infant.

Repeating something from the meeting to another person outside the meeting is a breach of confidence. Repeating something that directly or indirectly violates a person's anonymity is a gross violation of that person's confidence. It is okay to discuss with others one's own share, but not the shares of others. It is okay to discuss with others the themes that come up in a meeting. Naturally, these themes would be discussed from one's own personal perspective and would not include confidential information from others.

Guideline #5: We ask that no one attend our meeting under the influence of alcohol or drugs, unless the medication is prescribed by a physician.

We are all well aware that many survivors of childhood abuse have become chemically addicted or tend to abuse alcohol, drugs, and food. Survivors frequently turn to food, work, alcohol, and narcotics in an attempt to dull and numb their suffering. We

sometimes use chemical substances to escape from the reality of the past and the discomfort of the present. Many have worked through and/or persist in working on their sobriety as they continue their journey of recovery from childhood abuse.

Attending an ASCA meeting under the influence of alcohol or a drug not prescribed by a physician is neither helpful nor respectful to oneself nor to others attending the ASCA meeting. Even a single glass of wine or one beer can alter our mood and feelings. In addition to being free of chemicals, we should make an effort to avoid anything else that can dull or change our emotions or mood while we attend ASCA meetings.

Meeting Guideline # 6: ASCA meetings are not intended for survivors who are currently perpetrating abuse on others.

ASCA focuses on issues directly pertinent to our recovery from being abused physically, sexually, emotionally, and/or neglected as children. ASCA does not attempt to assist individual survivors who are currently or have previously perpetrated abuse on others. Other programs exist to help individuals with perpetrator-type behavior deal with impulse control, anger management, boundaries, etc.

The reality is, however, that some survivors, especially as older children or teenagers, did to other younger children some of what was done to them. In relating our story and experiences of abuse during ASCA meetings, it is okay and legitimate to briefly mention as part of our story that we abused a younger sibling, a cousin, a neighborhood child, etc. It is okay to acknowledge the basic outline of the facts and to express our feelings of remorse.

In addition, we acknowledge that, as adults, some survivors of child abuse also abused their own children while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, due to their own lack of self-control, etc. Some adult survivors report that their most common forms of abuse were emotional abuse and various forms of inappropriate discipline. Our experience with ASCA participants suggests that rarely does a survivor who sexually abused a child participate in ASCA. Again, it is permissible to briefly acknowledge the fact that one has abused their children in the past, to express remorse, and to note that the behavior has been extinguished. One does not elaborate or detail the abuse in any way when acknowledging such past behavior.

Again, it is okay to acknowledge the basic behavior. For example, “When I was 14, I abused my younger brother. I feel sad and disgusted that I did that. I am trying to deal with this situation today with my brother.” This statement briefly relates the basic outline of the facts of our story. There is an acknowledgement, an acceptance of responsibility, an expression of remorse and sorrow, and a plan to deal with this past situation.

It is not permissible to elaborate in any way whatsoever about the abusive behavior. For example, it is not within this guideline to explore or explain the type of abusive behavior, how often it occurred, the reasons, circumstances, etc. This guideline only permits a very brief, clear, and succinct note of basic facts.

Safety and focus are the two primary reasons for this guideline. ASCA meetings are for a community of survivors to come together. Therefore, the common good always preempts individual needs. Also, the focus on recovery from child abuse in ASCA is on what was done to us and how we are trying to move on with our lives.

2. Sharing Basics

Occasionally, members inquire into the parameters surrounding what can or cannot be shared in an ASCA meeting. Although we have clear meeting guidelines, especially Guideline #6, which prohibits any type of discussion or disclosure of past or present perpetrator-type behavior, and Guideline #7, which prohibits derogatory language concerning minority groups, etc.; and the share guidelines, which encourage us to speak about our feelings and to share in a way that others can "take in" what we are saying, additional clarification may be helpful for some participants.

Share Guidelines

Whether you are the 15-minute presenter or going to give a 5-minute share, what you say is important for you and for others in the meeting. In general, we encourage you to:

- ❑ speak about "your" feelings and to use "I" statements.
- ❑ speak in a way that people can "take in" what you are saying.
- ❑ stay focused on the agenda, step, or topic.

First, sharing is a two-way street. We share and disclose for the purpose of liberating ourselves from our secrets, our shame, our humiliation, our painful stories of childhood abuse, and the negative effects on our lives. We also share to reveal our successes, strategies, growth, and development as human beings affected by childhood abuse.

Yet, we share in the context of a community of ASCA members—people who have been through similar experiences. Thus, our sharing is intended not only as a catharsis and an opportunity to gain insight and support for ourselves but also to connect with others. We all know how various shares impact us—how we nod in empathy, how we squirm with discomfort, how our agitation oozes out, how our sadness releases tears as we listen to others share.

Some people think they should be permitted to share anything they want and in any manner they want. When our ASCA guidelines and spirit of sharing are crossed and not observed, a meeting can quickly descend into chaos. Most of us have had the

experience of this happening in a meeting. We feel unsafe, confused, and frightened. At this point, a meeting has ceased to be helpful and has turned counterproductive. Share guidelines are not intended to be controlling. Rather, share guidelines have the purpose of providing the conditions for the optimal healing experience for everyone—sharers and listeners.

Second, outside of Meeting Guidelines #6 and #7 mentioned above, there is no restriction concerning the content of our shares. Some people sense that their shares may be too intense for others or that others may feel uncomfortable with what they want to say. When this thought arises, we might begin our share by stating to the co-facilitators that we want to share something but are concerned that it may be too intense or that it may make others feel uncomfortable, and that we may need some help to stay within the guidelines.

What this introduction to a share does is free us up. We disclose our need to share something that feels potentially overwhelming and is a stretch of the guidelines. At the same time, we open ourselves up to support and assistance from the co-facilitators to keep us on track. Everyone in the room—sharers, co-facilitators, and listening members—is all rooting for us and wanting us to succeed. We are all doing the best we can with difficult material.

Third, sometimes sharers are intervened upon by the co-facilitators, not so much for the content of a share but rather for the manner, the tone, or the flavor in which the share is being presented. For example, if I start shouting and screaming, standing up, and moving about in an agitated way, the manner and style of my share and its tone have turned destructive. The share is no longer productive and helpful. Though it may feel cathartic for me, it has destroyed the sense of safety and soundness of the meeting. When a share veers off course and impinges on the integrity of the meeting, its safety, or its predictability, then the share must come to an immediate halt, usually with the intervention of a co-facilitator.

Another example to illustrate the manner, flavor, style, and nuance of a destructive share is how a sharer goes about disclosing the explicit sexually abusive behavior of their perpetrator. Most survivors, at some point in their recovery, find it helpful to relate what concretely happened—the rape, the seduction, the assault, the badgering, the threats, etc. However, some survivors, who may be unaware or lacking insight into this particular aspect of their lives, might describe the situation in a way that comes across as sexually arousing, as sleazy and slimy, in a manner meant to provoke others within the meeting. We can all probably recall one or two past situations in a meeting when a share moved from describing and relating something from a wrenching heart to describing and relating material that comes

more from the unhealthy part, from the out-of-control part, or from the pathological part of self.

This type of sharing usually seems okay in content, but rather the way, the manner, and the flavor of the presentation definitely feel and are experienced by the meeting members as inappropriate, unhelpful, and not within the spirit of sharing. The reality is that some people who attend ASCA meetings are hurt so much that they are often unaware of the way they come across. Though they may not consciously intend to be provocative, they inadvertently are. Provocation of any kind is always inappropriate and unhelpful in our meetings. Often, the intensity of a sharer's rebuttal to a co-facilitator's intervention is an indication of their inappropriateness.

Fourth, in turn, not every share that a listener may experience as uncomfortable is inappropriate. There are many things that people might share that are appropriate but that some people may feel uncomfortable with. Just because I may feel uncomfortable, uneasy, or agitated by a share does not make the share inappropriate or unhelpful. A feeling is a feeling; it is neither right nor wrong, neither good nor bad. But to make a judgment about the inappropriateness of a share, one must move from feeling to thinking. Does the share violate any of the guidelines? Is the share being presented in a manner that is provocative? If, in a concrete way, we cannot affirm the specifics of the violation, then the share is probably stirring up our own unresolved stuff around the material of the share. Therefore, we feel uncomfortable, uneasy, agitated, etc. Though uncomfortable, the share is still appropriate.

Finally, as stated at the beginning of every ASCA meeting, "By participating in this meeting, we all agree to honor and abide by… any interventions made by the co-facilitators." Again, sharing is a two-way street. To maintain the integrity of a meeting, it is helpful to approach a meeting in the spirit of trusting the co-facilitators and of trustingly deferring to the difficult decisions that co-facilitators sometimes have to make during a meeting.

Again, interventions are made not to control or humiliate, but rather to maintain the integrity of the meeting. Co-facilitators do the very best that they can. One reason we have two co-facilitators is for a check and balance. If you think that you will feel controlled if a co-facilitator, in all honesty and sincerity, thinks that they need to intervene on your share, then you might not be ready to participate in ASCA meetings. A measure of goodwill is helpful when participating in ASCA meetings.

Discussing “Sharing Basics” might take several meetings to fully explore. Hopefully, genuine discussion about sharing will lead to more helpful sharing for sharers and listeners alike, as well as less need for intervention by the co-facilitators.

3. Benefits of Volunteering and Preparing for the Opening 15-Minute Share

Volunteering to present the opening 15-minute share at an ASCA meeting is a wonderful opportunity and way to delve into a specific aspect of our recovery while enjoying, if not luxuriating in, some positive feedback from a caring and supportive community. Preparing for an opening 15-minute share can enhance the rewards we reap in terms of insights gained and emotions released. The following outline might be helpful in preparing, especially for ASCA participants who are doing the opening share for the first time.

First, orient yourself. Is the upcoming meeting Rotation A—open agenda, B—one of the particular steps, or C—a specific topic meeting? When the opening 15-minute share adheres to the rotation theme, it sets a helpful tone for other meeting participants. If Rotation A—open agenda—choose a theme or a specific area of your recovery that you want to share for 15 minutes. If Rotation B, consider reviewing the step in the *Survivor to Thriver* manual and working through some of the exercises to massage your memory. If Rotation C—for a topic meeting—ask the co-facilitators for the topic description and write-up, which will orient you and stimulate your thinking and reflection during the week. It would be helpful if the co-facilitators had a copy of the step or topic write-up to give to the volunteer.

Second, we can enhance our share and the resulting insights and emotional release if we spend small periods of time during the week reflecting on what we want to share. We have many opportunities during the day when we have a few minutes here and there to dwell on what we want to share. By dwelling on our upcoming share during the week, clarity, insight, and feelings will dovetail and connect with each other. Some people find it helpful to jot down a brief outline, especially if they feel a little anxious about their upcoming share or if they tend to wander when they talk.

Obviously, if we can spend a little time preparing for our share during the week, we will probably reap a cornucopia of benefits.

Third, if you need a little support in preparing your share, you can always ask one of the co-facilitators or e-mail The Morris Center at info@ascasupport.org. We are all here to help you be successful in your recovery efforts.

4. Cross-Talk: What It Is, What It Is Not

The topic of cross-talk often comes up, especially for newcomers to ASCA meetings. During the shares, no cross-talk is permitted. According to the instructions read by the co-facilitators during every meeting prior to the tag shares, *cross-talk* is defined as referring to another person in any way or commenting on another person's share.

What does this mean from a practical perspective, and what is the reasoning underpinning this guideline?

First, the no-cross-talk guideline exists to increase the level of safety for participants. Participants need to be able to share without the concern or fear that someone will, in any way whatsoever, criticize, demean, challenge, contradict, minimize, censure, question, etc., what they are feeling, thinking, and sharing. When someone is sharing, the role of others in the ASCA support group forum is to listen and take it in —to internally resonate and empathize. The group becomes a respectful, receptive vessel, receiving whatever a member is sharing. There is no judgment, evaluation, or opinion.

Second, responding to the speaker happens only during the formal feedback period for the meeting's main speaker. Participants can also "respond directly to a speaker" in a respectful manner following the closure of the meeting. By restricting feedback and comments to the shares during the meeting, a liberating and trusting environment is fostered.

Third, the purpose of sharing is to focus on oneself and what one is feeling and working on. When one of us begins a share by referring to or referencing someone else in the group, they are refocusing on that person rather than on themselves. If permitted to persist, this could have a negative influence on the ASCA meeting dynamic. During our shares, we also avoid referring to all of the group members as a whole with words like "we," "our," and "us."

Fourth, perhaps the biggest slip for newcomers concerning the no-cross-talk guideline is the spontaneous acknowledgment of a previous speaker and how the speaker has stirred them. That includes using the words “also” and “too,” i.e., “I also felt…” or “I too believe…”. From one perspective, this seemingly innocent gesture of acknowledgment seems harmless. What is important for ASCA meetings is consistency. The ASCA guidelines around no cross-talk are not meant to be impolite or unnatural. Rather, the guidelines are for consistency and safety.

Finally, these are not perfect guidelines, and many people have varying ideals about the no-cross-talk guideline. But for consistency, continuity, safety, and the common good, by participating in an ASCA meeting, we all agree to honor and abide by the stated guidelines and procedures of ASCA.

5. Using “I” vs. “You” Language

In ASCA, we emphasize the importance of using “I” language rather than “you” language. Why is that? We want to keep the focus in our meetings on ourselves whenever we share, rather than "projecting" our opinions, feelings, or thoughts onto others. This is an important aspect of our individual recovery work, so we have included it in our ground rules to keep our ASCA meetings feeling supportive and psychologically safe.

Here are some exceptions where a co-facilitator would not intervene for “you” language:

- ❑ When someone is using “you know” as a filler, similar to using “umm” when one is thinking about what to say next. Although we encourage everyone to be aware of it and try to break that habit, the co-facilitators will typically not intervene during the person’s share.
- ❑ When a person is quoting someone they had a conversation with or is quoting from a book or article. It’s helpful if the person sharing makes it clear that they are quoting a prior conversation. Otherwise, a co-facilitator might feel the need to intervene and try to clarify whether the person is quoting someone or not.

Sometimes “you” language is also cross-talk. For example, when someone in their share says, “You can see what I mean” or “I know you can understand,” it is first and foremost considered cross-talk. Here are some other examples of cross-talk:

- ❑ Calling or referring to someone in the meeting by name.
- ❑ Saying, “Someone else shared this earlier.”
- ❑ Saying “me too” or “I also feel that way,” even though it may be intended to validate others in the group. The only exception would be supportive feedback if the prior speaker has asked for feedback. Then it would be fine to say something like, “Thank you for your share. I, too, have felt….”

The topic of cross-talk often comes up, especially for newcomers to ASCA meetings. During the shares, no cross-talk is permitted. According to the instructions read by the co-facilitators during every meeting prior to the tag shares, *cross-talk* is defined as referring to another person in any way or commenting on another person’s share.

6. Art of Supportive Feedback

Supportive feedback, as an art form, increases our ability to be gracious people. It enhances our ability to gently touch and connect with others. As an interpersonal skill, supportive feedback can be developed and promoted in our daily lives. With focus, effort, and practice, most people can master the basics of supportive feedback.

In our ASCA meetings, supportive feedback helps to build community within the meeting, adding a dimension of cohesiveness, understanding, empathy, and compassion. In our daily lives, the art of giving supportive feedback is an essential communication skill. Increasing our ability to provide supportive feedback enhances the quality of our relationships—first, with ourselves and second, with others, such as family, co-workers, and friends. We learn to handle others and ourselves gently, respectfully, and carefully.

As an art-filled skill, supportive feedback is a conscious and deliberate way of approaching others and oneself. It is saying to others or to yourself that you are important. At this moment, you are my focus. I hear you. I want to support you.

As stated in our “Welcome to ASCA” handout, supportive feedback is one of the types of feedback permitted in our meetings. In ASCA, we define *supportive comments* as statements that are **empathetic**, **nurturing**, **encouraging**, **affirming,** and **validating**. Supportive feedback is not the time to give a mini-share. It is an opportunity to say something briefly and crisply that is directly supportive of the presenter.

If the comment does not include one of the five characteristics, i.e., empathy, nurture, encouragement, affirmation, or validation, then we do not consider it supportive feedback. It may be feedback, but it is not supportive feedback from an ASCA perspective.

Supportive feedback **is not** criticism in any form whatsoever. If you disagree with a share or parts of a share, either refrain from saying something or find something positive and empathetically supportive to say, like “I hear your struggle. I understand your hurt. I understand your confusion, frustration,” etc. At the very least, the recipient of the supportive feedback will sense that they have been heard. Feeling heard is supportive in and of itself.

- ❑ Supportive feedback is not telling someone what to do.
- ❑ Supportive feedback is not giving instructions to a person to do or not to do something.
- ❑ Supportive feedback is not a negative judgment.
- ❑ Supportive feedback does not include any negative statements.
- ❑ Supportive feedback is not saying something positive and then adding an if, and, or but. For example, “I feel inspired by what you did, **but** if you would....”
- ❑ Supportive feedback is supportively positive, period.
- ❑ Supportive feedback never includes ifs, ands, or buts.

Supportive feedback dwells within the realm of that which is positive. If the feedback contains even a smidgen of negativity, then it is not supportive feedback. What and how you might think the sharer could be doing things better are irrelevant when focusing on giving supportive feedback. When we offer supportive feedback, it needs to stay totally within the realms of **empathizing**, **nurturing**, **encouraging**, **affirming,** and **validating**.

Examples

Often, a supportive feedback statement will include several categories. It is difficult, at times, to split hairs and differentiate between aspects of the five categories. Some

examples of supportive feedback, using the five categories that comprise supportive feedback, follow.

Empathize

(Identifying with, understanding, and appreciating the other person's feelings and situation.)

- ❑ *What you described would have been difficult and painful for me.*
- ❑ *I feel sad that you had to go through all that junk.*
- ❑ *I cannot imagine going through what you have experienced.*

Nurture

(Nourishing the other, giving something positive to the other.)

- ❑ *I think I would have been scared in that situation. Thank you for sharing that.*
- ❑ *I appreciate the way you handled that situation.*
- ❑ *I feel inspired by your share.*
- ❑ *I appreciate what you said about….*

Encourage

(Supporting with inspiring words.)

- ❑ *I support you in what you are going through.*
- ❑ *I learned a lot from your share and plan to apply it to my own recovery.*

Affirm

(Making a positive statement that is true.)

- ❑ *I agree that it can take a lot of hard work for victims to transform their lives after child abuse.*
- ❑ *I feel admiration for confronting your abuser the way you did. I heard you say it took a lot of courage and determination to do that. I feel inspired by that.*

Validate

(To verify and declare that something is true.)

- ❑ *What you said made so much sense to me.*
- ❑ *I can really appreciate how you said you were feeling.*

- ❑ *Your share was so helpful to me.*

Also, even though a supportive comment has already been made by someone, repeating the supportive comment in one's own words is helpful for the presenter to hear from another person. We often need to hear the same supportive feedback many times in different ways before it takes root. When we support the presenter, we are also supporting each other and ourselves. We all absorb supportive comments vicariously.

To describe what supportive feedback is all about, we have tried to elaborate on its **five constituent parts: empathy, nurture, encouragement, affirmation,** and **validation**. The basic idea underpinning supportive feedback is to be supportively positive.

7. Supportive Feedback: Describing Me vs. Evaluating You

During supportive feedback in ASCA meetings, we try to avoid making *evaluative comments* because they assess and judge others and project our views. Instead, our supportive feedback can describe how *we feel* as a result of another person's share. In that way, our comment can be an "I" statement, which allows the recipient of feedback to decide for themselves whether or not our comment fits them.

If you find yourself wanting to make an evaluative comment, think about the impact of the person's share on *you* and the underlying message you want to convey. A useful formula to use is "I" followed by a feeling rather than "I" followed by an action. For example, "I feel hopeful…" rather than "I commend you…." In making these types of "I" statements, think about the other person's actions rather than the person themselves.

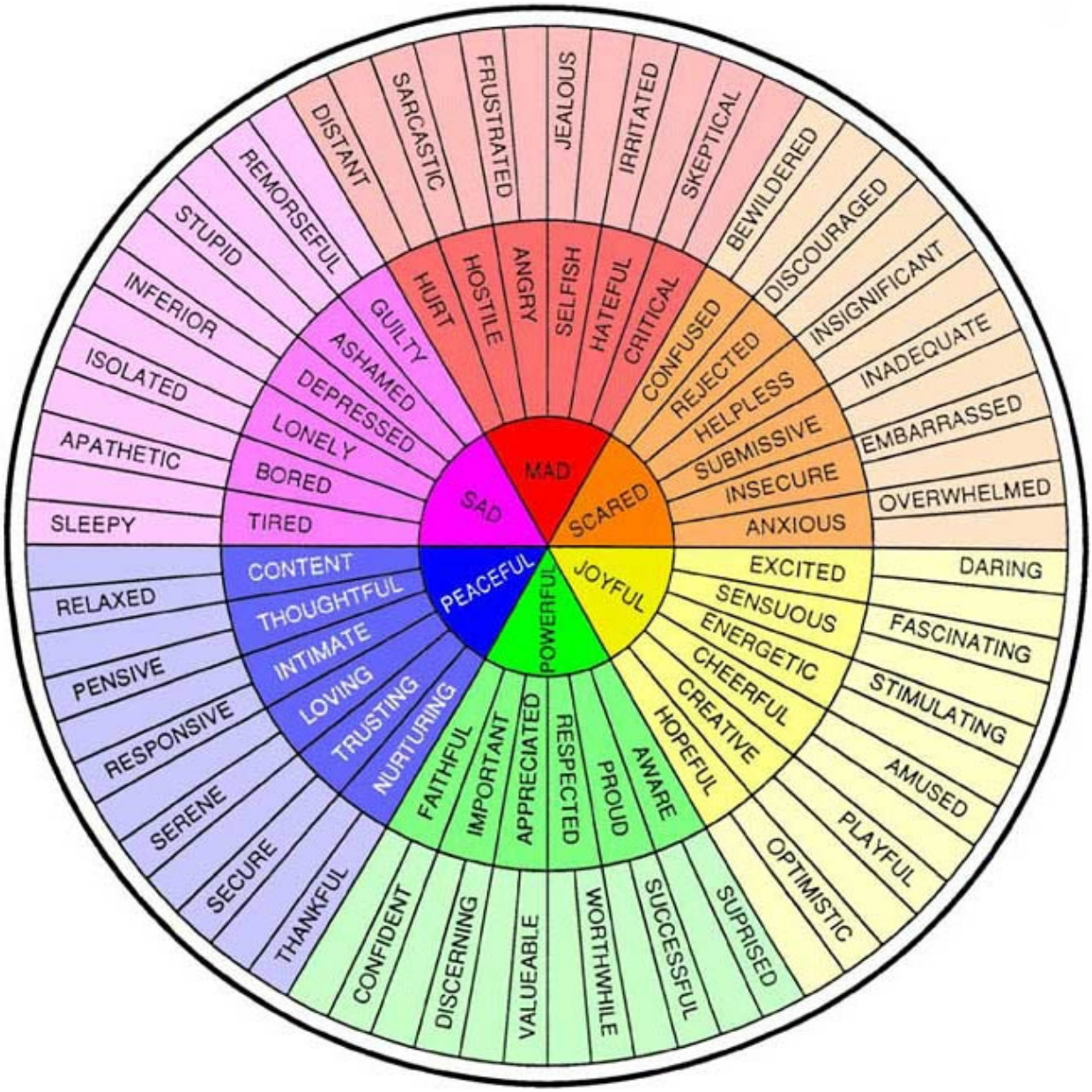
Here are some examples of evaluative comments, along with ways to rephrase them into descriptive comments:

Feedback Comments

Evaluating (You)	*Describing (Me)*
"You're so brave."	"I would have felt scared in that situation."
"I think you should try again. Don't give up."	"I hear how hard it is to keep going. I'm here to support you."
"That's exciting!"	"I feel excited after hearing your share!"
"You're doing so well."	"I admire what you've done."
"That's great! I commend you for confronting your abuser."	"I am inspired by how you confronted your abuser."
"Thank you for your vulnerability."	"Thank you for being so willing to share the details."
"Thank you for your honesty."	"I feel honored to be a witness to your share."
"Your share was put together well."	"I could really hear and take in what you were saying and relate to it."

The "Feelings Wheel" may help you identify your feelings *(next page):*

Feelings Wheel



8. Co-facilitator Interventions

One of the duties of a co-facilitator during an ASCA meeting is to intervene if any of the guidelines or the spirit of ASCA are being crossed, ignored, or disregarded. Co-facilitators report that intervening during a meeting is the most difficult, scary, and undesirable aspect of being a co-facilitator. It would be helpful to remember that co-facilitators do the best they can. They deserve our support, understanding, and cooperation.

There are two purposes for an intervention. The first purpose is to stop behavior that is ignoring our guidelines. The second purpose is to maintain the safety, integrity, and consistency of the meeting. Co-facilitators intervene because something seems to be amiss, and the co-facilitators make their best effort to rectify the situation.

Sometimes, a guideline is crossed unknowingly, and other times, a guideline is crossed on purpose, usually to provoke. The more common intervention is with a participant who is doing something unknowingly, perhaps out of ignorance of our guidelines. Sometimes, a participant may ask a question while giving a share, to which a co-facilitator responds to help clarify.

In the rare situation where a participant knowingly and purposefully violates a guideline, the situation needs to be taken seriously. The person needs to reconsider what they are doing and if ASCA is appropriate for them. ASCA meetings are not group process psychotherapy sessions but rather a communal support group whereby members agree to cooperate, adhere to the ASCA guidelines, and be respectful. An ASCA meeting is not a place to act out. It provides a place to receive and give support. A person who is not willing or is not capable of adhering to our ASCA guidelines and spirit is not a suitable candidate for participation in ASCA. ASCA meetings have limitations as a support program. It is not designed to deal with people who do not want to join cooperatively or who are not capable of abiding by the ASCA guidelines and spirit.

Co-facilitators intervene to maintain the safety, integrity, and consistency of the meetings. They do not intervene to be mean, to humiliate, or to scold. In these difficult situations, they do the best they can for the common good. During an ASCA

meeting, the co-facilitators are the final arbiters. Co-facilitators are not perfect. It takes time to cultivate the skills of an experienced co-facilitator. So, if a co-facilitator makes an intervention, doing the best that they can, we encourage participants to refrain from judgment, to cooperate, and to discuss the situation with the co-facilitators following the conclusion of the meeting.

Your ASCA meeting may want to plan a business meeting in the near future to discuss the role of the co-facilitators and interventions. Co-facilitators might describe what it feels like to intervene. Participants may describe what it feels like to be intervened on. The membership might discuss how to be supportive and cooperative during an intervention. What is usually helpful? What is usually unhelpful?

9. Supporting Your ASCA Meeting

Your ASCA meeting could use your ongoing support in several basic ways. An ASCA meeting does not just happen but rather relies on the goodwill of its participants. We support them by observing the meeting guidelines and backing up the co-facilitators. In a community-based meeting, participants support their meeting through their willingness to take turns functioning as co-facilitators. Also, supporting the meeting includes giving a reasonable donation to help with the ongoing expenses of a community-based meeting. Provider-based meetings charge a fee between ten and twenty dollars, which covers meeting expenses, including payment to the provider who organizes the meeting and is usually the facilitator or co-facilitator of the meeting.

Another important way to support your meeting is by spreading the word. You might have the best support group meeting in the world, but if others do not become aware of the meeting, a productive meeting can soon die off. In addition, if you have the time and energy, you might consider helping one of the new board members by joining a committee. The Morris Center, the creator of ASCA, is primarily a volunteer-oriented organization. Without interested and enthused people coming forward and donating their time, energy, and talents, our organization would soon fold.

The meeting might take a little time each week to discuss the various needs of the meeting and how members can creatively and concretely support the ongoing success of their meeting. Without you, there is no meeting.

10. Money & Donations

Many people feel awkward and uncomfortable discussing money and finances. These feelings, and others, can derive from various experiences with money. We may feel somewhat ignorant or inexperienced about money matters. We might have had negative experiences with money, or we might not have sufficient resources for our personal needs and wants. We may have felt used about money, etc. Some view money as power, as a way to manipulate, as a necessary evil, etc. And some people simply prefer not to think about or talk about money. In reference to paying for services that assist in our recovery from childhood abuse, many of us feel resentful that we need to pay out of our own pocket for various services to recover from the abuse that was inflicted upon us, which was no fault of our own. We feel resentful that insurance does not cover much of our recovery needs and that our perpetrators seldom make amends.

In every *community-based* ASCA meeting, the basket is passed around for donations. These donations are used to pay the rent, to help pay the ASCA telephone information line, to list the meeting on the web site, and for meeting incidentals like printing, etc. In *provider-based* meetings, however, participants pay a set fee to the meeting provider. The fee covers the meeting expenses and pays for the provider's time in organizing and facilitating the provider-based ASCA meeting.

It is probably healthy and helpful for community-based ASCA meetings to hold a business meeting on a quarterly basis to address meeting finances through an open discussion. Co-facilitators do not bear the burden of meeting finances. This is the responsibility of every member. Everyone should be aware of the expenses that the meeting incurs and how much needs to be collected on a weekly basis in order to maintain a financially healthy meeting. Are there any particular financial concerns that your meeting needs to address?

11. Peer Support Sign-Up

Many, but not all, ASCA meetings pass around the “Peer Support Sign-Up” sheet at the beginning and end of the meeting. The telephone sign-up sheet states:

> Signing this list is totally voluntary. If you want to volunteer as a telephone support person during the week, please print your name and telephone number. During the last part of our meeting, the phone list will be passed around again. At that time, members can copy down phone numbers of individuals they want to stay in contact with this week. At the end of the meeting, the list will be destroyed. Your name will be active only for the time between meetings.

What is a support person? A *support person* is a member of the ASCA meeting who volunteers to be available by phone to receive calls from another member of the ASCA meeting who may need support during the week, between meetings. The volunteer generously donates their time to support another ASCA member in need for one week only.

However, even though a person has volunteered, if their circumstances change during the week, they have no obligation to continue to be a support person. If this should happen and someone calls, the volunteer might simply say something like, “I’m sorry, but my situation has changed and I am not in a position to function as a support person this week. You might want to call another person on the list for more immediate support.”

The “Peer Support Sign-Up” procedure operates on the honor system. Names and contact information taken from the list should only be used to request support. They should never be used for personal gain, like soliciting a date. This is not a social listing, but a list for support. Trust is a basic concern for all survivors. Misuse of the list erodes trust and hinders our recovery.

12. Disinviting an ASCA Participant

Under certain extreme conditions, the co-facilitators, in conjunction with the meeting membership, have the option, authority, and responsibility to disinvite and prohibit a survivor from participating in ASCA meetings. This has happened only three times since 1993. It is a strong and decisive action taken by the co-facilitators and meeting members to guarantee the ongoing safety of the group.

There are two basic conditions that trigger the process of disinviting someone from participating in ASCA meetings. **First**, the individual refuses to observe the meeting guidelines. In the past, this has focused on a survivor who also happens to be a perpetrator. The person has a need to discuss issues and personal dynamics connected with perpetrating abuse on others. Usually, the person is seeking help.

However, ASCA is a program for survivors of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or neglect. ASCA is not a program to assist people with their perpetration issues and behaviors. Such people need assistance that ASCA is not designed to offer. These people need to be referred to another appropriate program where they can receive the necessary help that they seek. If a person is presently perpetrating or has recently perpetrated abuse on a child or teenager, they are not an appropriate candidate for ASCA.

The **second condition** that triggers the process of disinviting is more difficult to articulate. It pertains to an ASCA participant who, in the big picture, is perpetrating some type of abuse, taking advantage of the meeting, or taking advantage of some of its members. It might be a situation whereby the person consistently shares in a manner that is offensive and/or antagonistic to other members. One example is when the person's share is highly sexualized in nature. To many people within the group, the shares appear more in the service of titillating and harassing than dealing with and focusing on past abuse. The confirmation of this dynamic is that many, if not most, people have the same negative reaction over a period of time to these repeated types of shares.

Another scenario involves a participant harassing a group member or members, possibly for dating purposes. The person's boundaries are poor. The person's boundaries are poor. The person may be taking advantage of the vulnerability of a

group member or members. The person may try to ingratiate themselves with a member of the group and then try to take advantage of the person.

When a difficult situation like any of the above occurs in the meeting, the co-facilitators should check out and discuss the situation among themselves. To help clarify, gain perspective, and strategize options and possible interventions, the co-facilitators might consider contacting The Morris Center or discussing the situation on the ASCA Meeting Facilitators Yahoo group [editor's note: not running as of 2021 and earlier]. Other co-facilitators can be a wonderful resource to each other in such situations. In some instances, senior members of the ASCA meeting can also provide perspective if they are able and willing to be objective and fair. In general, we do not advise involving other meeting members in this decision because of the mixed feelings it could stir up.

On behalf of the group's safety, co-facilitators **always** have the authority to ask a participant to leave a meeting at any time. To enact the process of disinviting and prohibiting the person from future ASCA meetings, the co-facilitators should take the meeting membership into counsel through a business meeting. When a person is officially disinvited from attending ASCA meetings, they should be given other local resources that might be useful. The disinvited person should also be told that if they try to attend an ASCA meeting in the future, the co-facilitators will immediately and automatically call the police to have the person removed. It is the standard procedure —no ifs, ands, or buts.

The process of disinviting is a rare occurrence. Because most ASCA meetings are open to the general public, sometimes a person who is not an appropriate candidate for ASCA may appear at a meeting. Though the process of disinviting may raise anxiety, fears, and other distressing feelings, it is an opportune occasion to practice assertiveness, firmness, compassion, and courage. It is an opportunity to practice teamwork and collaboration. It is an invitation to stretch ourselves and grow.

For more information on the process of disinviting a participant, please contact The Morris Center or review the *ASCA Co-facilitator Toolkit* included in this manual.

13. Purpose of Periodic Business Meetings

The directions to co-facilitators found in the *ASCA Meeting Format and Support Materials* on page 16 note that ASCA meetings profit from having a monthly business meeting to discuss issues and make local meeting-based decisions. Some ASCA meetings hold business meetings regularly. Others rarely, if ever, have a business meeting.

For community-based ASCA meetings, business meetings are a way for the co-facilitators to share the responsibilities associated with managing the ongoing success of a local ASCA meeting. It is an opportunity for the co-facilitators to bring to the attention of the meeting membership areas of concern or decisions that need to be made concerning undercurrents within the meeting, paying meeting bills, the need for new co-facilitators to take a turn at running the meeting, etc.

The most important function of holding an ongoing business meeting is to function as a check and balance, raising concerns and needs that need to be addressed and taken care of for the continued success and healthiness of the meeting. When was the last time your group held a business meeting?

14. Selecting Helpful Topics and Accompanying Handout Materials for Rotation C ASCA Meetings

One of the duties of the co-facilitators is to decide upon an appropriate topic and corresponding material for the meeting when Rotation C—a topic-oriented meeting—takes its turn. To aid in this task, we used to present a topic in the *ASCA News* each month. All past topics, along with their accompanying narratives, can be found on our website.

The co-facilitators and the meeting membership can choose the suggested topic of the month, select a topic from our archive list, or opt for another topic that may be more helpful for their particular meeting group. Some meetings have taken a few paragraphs from recovery-oriented books or articles. Others have written some of their own material.

There is one general rule to follow when choosing an alternative topic: topics must be inclusive of the entire meeting membership. For example, selecting the topic of incest might leave some members of the group out since not all ASCA participants have experienced incest. Or choosing the topic of suicide might again leave some members wanting, since not all ASCA participants experience suicidal ideations or have attempted suicide.

The guideline around inclusiveness means that the topic needs to be sufficiently broad to accommodate all meeting participants. A broad and general topic, like “Resistance: The Rusty Hinges of Recovery” in the “ASCA Rotation C Reader,” is capable of including everyone. Yet, as you have read in the resistance narrative, the narrative can present a particular focus or perspective.

Participants may or may not identify with the general written perspective of the topic, but they can always identify with the basic topic itself. So, whether a person agrees, disagrees, likes, dislikes, applauds, or yawns concerning the written material focusing on the topic, everyone can at least identify and ascent to the topic and consequently address the topic in their share.

Sometimes a focused topic can be broadened sufficiently to include everyone. For example, there is a school of survivorship that strongly argues that forgiving the abuser is an important aspect of recovery. Yet, there is another school of thought among survivors that would argue just as strongly that forgiving a perpetrator is impossible and that forgiveness is actually a form of denial.

Irrespective of where you stand on this topic, forgiveness is a human experience and therefore an issue that every survivor needs to come to grips with, one way or another. So, instead of stating and presenting the topic as, e.g., “The Need to Forgive Our Perpetrators,” “Forgiveness Is a Sign of Health,” or “Forgiveness: The Last Stage of Recovery,” simply stating the topic as “Forgiveness: What Do We Do With It?” or “Forgiveness: What Does It Mean?” could stimulate an in-depth sharing among the members. Every ASCA member has personally experienced either giving or receiving forgiveness.

Topics are not debated. The idea behind the topic rotation is to provide an opportunity to review and discuss material that is important to recovery from childhood abuse yet may not be covered in the 21 Steps or, in general, through our *Survivor to Thriver* manual. The manner in which co-facilitators decide to present Rotation C topics can often make a difference for the meeting membership. Some meetings routinely spend a few moments developing a list of potential topics for future meetings. Co-facilitators might find this procedure helpful and supportive.

If you have a suggestion for a topic, let us know or post it in the ASCA Meeting Facilitators Yahoo group [Ed.: no longer running as of 2021 and earlier]. Many topics presented in prior *ASCA News* issues came from suggestions or requests made by ASCA members. See also the "ASCA Rotation C Reader" on our website, ascasupport.org.

15. Relevancy of Ongoing Education During Regular ASCA Meetings

Near the end of the ASCA meeting co-facilitator script, there is a suggestion that, following the announcements, the meeting spend a few moments on what we call "ongoing education." Some meetings conduct ongoing education at almost every meeting. Other meetings tend not to include this aspect in their meetings.

We encourage spending a few moments at every meeting on ongoing education for a variety of reasons. First, a well-educated ASCA meeting membership ensures healthy meetings, increases safety, and adds to an atmosphere of support and respect.

Second, new participants join a group periodically, and they need to be educated about the various dynamics of an ASCA meeting, along with the rationale behind why ASCA meetings are organized and run in specific ways. Participants tend to violate our guidelines and the spirit of the ASCA philosophy less when they have a thorough understanding of ASCA ways and procedures.

Third, during ongoing education moments, co-facilitators have the opportunity to clarify and be preemptive about an unhealthy or troubling dynamic that they may see

emerging within a meeting. For example, a newcomer may be bordering on violating the cross-talk guideline. The co-facilitators might use the ongoing education moment to discuss what cross-talk is all about.

Fourth, established meetings might tend to become a little slack in observing certain guidelines. This may result in confusion and trouble.

Finally, continually reviewing various aspects of the ASCA meeting can be reassuring to the participants. When co-facilitators are perceived as being helpful, on top of things, and thoughtful about what is going on in a meeting, members, especially the new members of a group, tend to feel reassured, secure, and safe.

The bottom line is that it can be most helpful to an ASCA meeting to use a few minutes at every meeting to do a short ongoing education moment on various aspects of the ASCA meeting.

16. Preparing for an ASCA Meeting

There are many different thoughts concerning whether or how to prepare to participate in an ASCA meeting. One thought goes that one should just be spontaneous in the meeting. Sometimes, another person's share will spark something within us. Often, we find it helpful for our recovery to share this spark during the meeting. Another thought notes that it can be overwhelming at times to dwell on the past, especially during the initial phase of recovery from childhood abuse. This stance points to the wisdom that a safe and supportive time and place to let memories and feelings surface would be during an ASCA meeting. Just being present and listening to others share can be an emotionally healing message.

For participants who feel comfortable and have the time and energy, thinking about what one wants to share might assist in reaping more from the meeting. There are many benefits to reflecting on material that one might want to share in a meeting. One benefit is that it can keep us in touch with our feelings. Another benefit is that it permits us to review and recall the past in a safe and focused manner. When we dwell on what we want to talk about at the next ASCA meeting, all kinds of thoughts, memories, and feelings seem to connect with each other. We seem to gain some

insight and a little emotional resolution by ruminating over material for a possible share.

When the next ASCA meeting is Rotation B Step or Rotation C Topic, the step or topic can assist in focusing our reflections. Some members find it helpful to read over the step or topic every day or every other day just to keep it fresh and focused in their minds. This repeated refocusing often unearths a recovery treasure of thoughts and feelings, adding one more piece toward resolution and healing.

There might be some benefits to members exchanging different ways that they use to prepare for an ASCA meeting. The meeting might spend a little time discussing various strategies for preparing for an ASCA meeting. Often, our strategies depend on our time and energy levels. There is no single answer to preparing. Preparation, in part, depends upon where we are in our recovery.

17. Conflicts Within a Meeting

In many ways, an ASCA meeting is a microcosm of our daily lives, i.e., the manner in which we interact with people, events, and things we encounter during the course of our day. Conflicts within an ASCA meeting can arise in a variety of ways. Common meeting conflicts revolve around miscommunication and personality clashes.

Communication difficulties might include cross-talk, an unkind or insensitive remark before or after the meeting, or a clumsy or awkward intervention by a co-facilitator. We may feel misunderstood, angry, anxious, uncomfortable, etc. When such situations arise, they provide us with opportunities to practice constructive assertiveness, improve communication skills, and develop a desire to reconnect with the other person. In the past, when we felt misunderstood, angry, anxious, etc., we might have withdrawn, blamed ourselves, or responded aggressively and harshly. Part of what an ASCA meeting is all about is practicing—practicing new and better ways of interacting with others. We can practice being constructive rather than destructive, tolerant rather than impatient, and empathetic rather than distant. In a sense, practicing is part of reconfiguring old maladaptive thoughts and behaviors in positive, constructive, and connecting ways.

The meeting might decide to discuss how to practice ways of dealing with conflict inside and outside of a meeting. What do we do when there is miscommunication or misunderstanding in a meeting? What do we do when we have a personality clash with another ASCA member? Discussing these matters prior to an actual conflict might provide some practice in dealing with difficult situations. Practice does not make us perfect, but it sure helps smooth off the rough edges of life.

18. Using the *Survivor to Thriver* Manual

The Morris Center's *Survivor to Thriver* manual was created as an accompaniment to the recovery process for adult survivors of physical, sexual, and/or emotional child abuse or neglect. We should always remember, however, that our manual and ASCA are only two of many different and powerful ways that we survivors use to heal our emotional wounds and to move on with our lives.

The *Survivor to Thriver* manual offers an organized way and plan to proceed. It is a differentiating aid to help us clarify our story of abuse and recovery. Providing exercises that gently challenge us to work through some of our unresolved issues, the manual is full of practical ways of looking at our past abuse experiences and how we proceed with our recovery. Often, the material will stimulate our recall and jog our memory. In working through much of the material, we may notice a piggyback effect, whereby one memory leads to another, to another, or to an elaboration and clarification of past situations. The manual challenges us in many ways to rethink, clarify, and acknowledge not only the past but also our present and future. Finally, many people who regularly attend ASCA meetings find that their shares become more insightful and fruitful when they work through some of the material in the manual during the week.

The *Survivor to Thriver* manual is available for your use by downloading or ordering a printed bound copy of the manual from our website: ascasupport.org.

19. Sharing that Connects/Sharing that Disconnects

Do you ever wonder why we sometimes connect and listen intently to one person's share and why we sometimes disconnect, withdraw, or stop listening to another person's share?

Why are we drawn to connecting? Often, we are drawn because the person speaks from the heart, relating events and experiences with a depth of feeling. Feeling language tends to open us up. We present ourselves to other ASCA participants without a façade. We demonstrate vulnerability and trust. In turn, ASCA members tend to embrace and hold these shares gently, respectfully, and supportively.

Why do we withdraw? Sometimes our withdrawal has nothing to do with the person sharing, but rather how their issues being addressed affect our own unresolved issues. For example, if a sharer describes a painful experience that is similar to my personal situation, I might withdraw and dissociate. What is being discussed might be just too difficult and painful for me to hear at this time.

Sometimes, I might withdraw because the presenter is rambling and it takes too much energy to follow. At other times, I might withdraw because the sharer is devoid of feelings and I feel like I am listening to a robot instead of a human being. Sometimes, I might withdraw because the sharer is shouting or is expressing their anger in a way that makes me feel pushed away rather than drawn to empathize. Sometimes, I withdraw because the person speaking continues to basically repeat the same share week after week.

What manner of sharing tends to draw you in? What manner of sharing tends to push you away? What manner of sharing tends to leave you feeling connected and/or disconnected?

20. Handling Triggers During Meetings

ASCA meetings give people a chance to share powerful emotions and personal stories that may have been kept locked inside their hearts for decades. Generally, such sharing is beneficial to the person sharing and to those who are listening. However, there are times when a share can set off triggers that generate panic within the speaker or the listener. Handling triggers and panic is nothing new to child abuse survivors. However, the ASCA sharing environment may be new and may require new strategies for safe management.

There is no one set of strategies for all people. Each of us deals with triggers in different ways. If there is any rule, it might be that we each come to meetings, as we do for the rest of our lives, with a trigger plan, i.e., ways in which we deal with emotional triggers.

Some suggestions:

- Remember that any abuse that a speaker might be referencing is not happening right now. It happened long ago. The abuser is not in the room with you, even though sometimes it may feel that way, particularly if the speaker seems to “channel” the voice of the abuser by imitating abusive talk in the same tone as the abuser. Keep in mind that it is not the abuser talking. The abuser is far away, and you are in a room with like-minded people.
- Try not to get carried away by the stories you are hearing, and be mindful that their purpose is to give the speaker an opportunity for self-expression. A listener can get lost in the actual story and start to embellish it in their own mind. Stay with the speaker and what they are trying to accomplish.
- Stay in tune with your feelings. Sometimes it helps to label them. So, if a speaker’s account is upsetting you, you can say, privately in your mind, “This is upsetting me,” “This is triggering me,” or “This person’s story is frightening me.” Wrapping your emotions in words can have the effect of distancing you from them just enough to reduce panic.
- Be aware of your body. Sometimes it helps to press your feet against the ground and feel them there. Similarly, it may help to feel your body in the chair or to tighten your muscles and release them.

- If necessary, leave the room. While courtesy suggests that we don't walk out on other people's shares for phone calls and the like, walking out to avoid a panic attack would be understandable and probably desirable to others in the room.

Many other strategies are possible. Perhaps you can prepare them in advance with the help of a therapist or friend, or with the aid of books on the subject. You can also refer to the “Daily Survival Tips” section in the “Welcome to ASCA” meeting handout.

21. Anything Puzzling You About ASCA Meetings?

Is there anything that hinders you from participating fully in ASCA?

ASCA meetings are structured with aspects and dimensions that may not be clear to a new co-facilitator, a meeting newcomer, or even a veteran ASCA participant. It’s important to receive clear and helpful information about ASCA. Please don’t hesitate to contact us via e-mail at info@ascasupport.org if you have a question. We welcome your inquiries and observations.