

Q: How do I start?

A: As in most new roles, you will need to get comfortable by seeking support and guidance from people you trust. Join together with others in the community to give a speech. If you are new to public speaking, practice among friends. No matter how tentative your first steps may seem, the most important thing is to start small. The common sense steps below are a good set of guidelines for participation:

- No recovering person should advocate publicly if their sobriety, job or financial well-being will be put into jeopardy.
- No recovering person should advocate at the level of public media unless they have two years of recovery.
- No one who is advocating in the media should identify themselves as a member of any specific twelve-step group.

Here is another thought from Bill Wilson to keep in mind as you proceed:

“So let us hasten to work alongside those projects of promise to hasten the recovery of millions who have not yet found their way out. These varied labors do not need our special endorsement; they need only a helping hand, when, as individuals, we can possibly give it.”

The following organizations can help you get started:

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)

20 Exchange Place, Suite 2902
New York, NY 10005
Hopeline: 800-NCA-CALL
www.ncadd.org
Sponsors the Registry of Addiction Recovery (ROAR), a national volunteer campaign to fight the stigma associated with alcoholism and other drug addictions. Application forms are available on NCADD’s website or from the address above.

Alcohol Policies Project

Center for Science in the Public Interest
1875 Connecticut Ave., N.W. #300
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 332-9110 ext. 385
www.cspinet.org/booze/
A watchdog group that offers advocacy and information on federal and state alcohol policy.

Join Together

441 Stuart Street, 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 437-1500
www.jointogether.org
A national resource helping communities fight substance abuse and gun violence. Its web site provides access to the latest news and research. A **SPEAK UP** section has been added to collect personal stories on seeking treatment.

National Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC)

901 N. Washington St., Suite 600
Alexandria, VA 22314-1535
(800) 548-0497
www.naadac.org
The largest national organization representing the interests of alcoholism and drug abuse treatment and prevention professionals across the United States.

Legal Action Center

236 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Suite 505
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 544-5478
153 Waverly Place
New York, NY 10014
(212) 243-1313
www.lac.org
Provides advocacy for expanding addiction treatment and prevention, and fighting discrimination against people who are in recovery from alcoholism, drug dependence and HIV/AIDS.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

PO Box 541688
Dallas, TX 75354-1688
800-GET-MADD
www.madd.org
A nonprofit, grassroots organization with more than 600 chapters nationwide with a focus on effective solutions to drunk driving and underage drinking problems, while supporting the victims of these crimes.

National Association for Children of Alcoholics

11426 Rockville Pike, Suite 100
Rockville, MD 20852
888-554-COAS
www.nacoa.org
Advocates for children and families affected by alcoholism and other drug dependencies and offers programs and materials to help children of alcoholics.

Physician Leadership for National Drug Policy

Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies
Brown University
Box G-BH
Providence, RI 02912
(401) 444-1817
www.plndp.org
A group of prominent physicians who have come together to advocate for effective policies on addiction treatment. Nearly 4,000 associate members are located throughout the country.

Advocacy with Anonymity

“HOW CAN I
STAND UP FOR MY RIGHTS
WITHOUT VIOLATING THE
ANONYMITY TRADITION OF MY
TWELVE-STEP GROUP?”

“Hello. I’m a recovering alcoholic/addict working a twelve-step program.

I am feeling better in my sobriety and more and more grateful for the blessings that it has brought me.

I want to reach out and help others who are still suffering from drug and alcohol addiction.

I hear the terms ‘advocacy’ and ‘anonymity’ all the time, but I’m not sure what they mean or how they apply to me.

What can I do to help other alcoholics and addicts who are still suffering?

And how can I increase the public’s understanding of these diseases?”

This person is one of many men and women in recovery across the nation who want to speak out and share their experiences with others still in the throes of alcohol and drug addiction.

If you, too, are in recovery and want to speak out for the greater good and to talk about the obstacles you have overcome, this pamphlet will help you feel more comfortable with the concept.

You can speak out publicly without compromising the principles of the recovery program in which you participate.

By doing so, you will be reaching out to alcoholics, addicts, their families, and their communities and providing them with new hope.

Anonymity...

...at the level of the media, is the cornerstone principle of many twelve-step groups and recovery programs. It is an essential element of success because it gives the recovering person the protection he/she needs from scrutiny.

...also plays a crucial role in establishing personal humility, which is a cornerstone of the spiritual foundation of recovery.

The principle of anonymity was established to keep groups from becoming enmeshed in any public controversy that would divert them from their primary purpose of helping alcoholics and addicts to get sober. The traditions that follow lay out the principle of anonymity as it applies to many twelve-step groups.

Tradition 6

“A [twelve-step group] ought never endorse, finance or lend the [twelve-step group] name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

Tradition 10

“The [twelve-step group] has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the [twelve-step group] ought never to be drawn into any public controversy.”

Tradition 11

“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.”

Clearly, this does not preclude you from speaking out about your own recovery or from advocating for the rights of other alcoholics and addicts, as long as you do not involve the twelve-step group by name. But while the idea of speaking out may interest you, you may be grappling with a number of concerns. Here are some of the questions typically asked, as well as information to make you feel more comfortable with this new idea.

Q: Even if the traditions do not specifically preclude advocacy that does not associate itself specifically with any twelve-step group, isn’t it still harmful?

A: Absolutely not. There is a long and extensive tradition of people in recovery speaking out as advocates for the individual rights of others. In fact, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were on the founding board of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), the nation’s oldest advocacy group. The passage below, taken from a 1958 Grapevine article, details Bill Wilson’s memory of this important event:

“Then came Marty Mann (NCADD founder). As a recovered alcoholic, she knew that public attitudes had to be changed, that alcoholism was a disease and that alcoholics could be helped. She developed a plan for an organization to conduct a vigorous plan of public education and to organize citizens’ committees all over the country. She brought the plan to me. I was enthusiastic. . . .”

Q: Why does the recovering community need to develop an active and enthusiastic public policy?

A: Because we are all losing the war. Never has there been less funding and access to treatment for the alcoholic and the addict. The alcoholics’ and addicts’ share of the research pool continues to drop dramatically. There is no political or financial downside to removing alcoholics’ and addicts’ legal, social and financial rights. We are an invisible population, hiding behind a mask of stigma and shame. We must become visible again.

Q: How should I speak out?

A: Start by telling your story. Talk about recovery and how you achieved it. Describe the situation in your community and the kinds of barriers that prevent many people from getting treatment. People rarely see the faces of recovering alcoholics and addicts. They need to see firsthand that treatment really does work. The question which has been posed to me the most about this whole issue is: “If I recovered through Alcoholics Anonymous, how do I talk about my recovery in the media without referring to AA?” I believe we must answer this question definitively if we are to be successful in this effort.

Q: What do I say about my membership in a twelve-step group if it was the means of my recovery?

A: Simply say, “I found recovery through a twelve-step group, but our traditions do not permit me to name it in the media.”

Q: Where should I speak out?

A: Start by talking with one other person or a small group. As you become more comfortable talking about your disease and recovery, expand your audience. You may want to speak at meetings of civic or religious organizations. As your comfort grows you may want to speak publicly or privately with your city council, state legislators or other public officials.

Q: How can I advocate if I am uncomfortable speaking publicly?

A: Write letters to your local newspaper responding to a published article on the subject. Submit an op-ed piece on a relevant topic such as expanding insurance coverage for the treatment of addiction and alcoholism. Write to your elected officials supporting the rights of alcoholics and addicts.