

# OA GUIDELINES



## Guidelines for Anonymity in the Digital World

Digital communication was unforeseen when the Twelve Traditions were written. It is important to consider how the use of electronic media might impact our own or anyone else's anonymity as we recover and help to carry the message of recovery offered by the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous. These guidelines build on our Fellowship's experience and offer solid suggestions on the importance of maintaining our personal anonymity and the anonymity of OA members in the virtual world.

### PERTINENT OA LITERATURE AND POLICIES

#### Traditions

Tradition Eleven: Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.

Tradition Eleven addresses the need for members to be anonymous outside the Fellowship at the level of public media. By following this Tradition, we guard against the assumption that any one person's recovery represents OA as a whole. We also guard against the temptation for an individual to seek public recognition. Members who ignore our Eleventh Tradition can cause damage to OA's spirit of fellowship, which is essential to our personal healing. Such breaks of anonymity may bring the OA name before the public, but they can also bring jealousy and competition for publicity and financial rewards. We must be willing to surrender our need for recognition to protect our recovery and OA as a whole.

AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* cautions, "At this altitude [public], anonymity—100 percent anonymity—was the only possible answer. Here, principles would have to come before personalities, without exception" (p. 187).

Tradition Twelve: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Within the OA Fellowship, members have the right to decide for themselves what they reveal. At the same time, we share a responsibility to guard the anonymity of our fellow members.

#### Overeaters Anonymous Statement on Public and Social Media Policy

While Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues, including social media, the delegates of the 2019 World Service Business Conference recommend that any OA member, group, or service body using social media for OA public information and public awareness maintain the personal anonymity of OA members.

Members of Overeaters Anonymous are anonymous. The Fellowship is not. Members of Overeaters Anonymous are responsible for maintaining their anonymity and respecting the anonymity of other OA members. When attending an OA meeting, whether face-to-face or virtual, members are encouraged to seek appropriate means to protect their own anonymity and that of fellow members.

All registered virtual meetings shall inform members that their anonymity is not fully protected when attending a virtual meeting. (WSBC Policy 2011a, amended 2016 and 2019)

### STANDARDS FOR VARIOUS FORMS OF DIGITAL MEDIA

We need to use caution in OA-related emails. We are publishing at the public level when we post on

social media or blog. What we send or post may easily be seen, even repeated, by others within and outside the Fellowship. When we break our anonymity in digital media, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others. Others may rightly or wrongly assume that our “virtual friends” are OA members.

**Email** – Electronic mail is a method of exchanging digital messages.

- Avoid the use of your full name as a part of your email address.
- Avoid the use of your business email address. It implies affiliation with an outside interest.

### **Service Email Correspondence WITHIN the Fellowship**

It is advisable to set up a second email address for OA correspondence. If a service body has ongoing service positions that use email, we may create email accounts for the positions, such as chair@servicebody or newsletter@servicebody. Accounts can then be passed on to the next person filling that position simply by changing the forwarding information.

Many service providers allow one email address to be linked to another for convenience, so managing email is simple. Email can be forwarded from the service body account to our personal account. We can then see all of our email without having to log into a second account, unless we need to send a reply.

When sending service body correspondence to multiple members at once, it is important to maintain their anonymity. Use the blind carbon copy (BCC) line or create a distribution group or list with a meaningful title. Don't use program words, such as “Twelve Step,” in the title, which might compromise anonymity when the message shows up in the receiver's email in-box. For help in finding the BCC feature or in creating a distribution list, check the email provider's instructions.

### **Service Email Correspondence OUTSIDE the Fellowship**

It is also a good idea to have an email address that reflects our service position if we have responsibilities that require us to contact professionals or members of the media. It is appropriate to use our full name

in such correspondence. This is the exception; we use our full name as this is the standard when conducting business, including when contacting the media and public information contacts. If we are then asked for an interview as a result of this correspondence, it is our responsibility to inform/educate the person doing the interview of our anonymity policy and that no last names or pictures may be used. For more suggestions and resources for contacting the media about OA, find the “Public Information Resource List” on the OA website (oa.org/document-library under “Public Information”).

### **Personal Email Correspondence and Contact Lists**

When we add a member's name to our personal contact list or electronic address book, we do not place personal reminders in the name field, i.e. Kathy (OA). If information is forwarded, the name is displayed and anonymity may be broken.

### **Blogs**

If we mention our membership in Overeaters Anonymous, then we do not use our full name and/or photo on the blog page. If we want to use our name and/or photo, we do not mention our association with Overeaters Anonymous, nor make references that would disclose our membership.

**Messaging Applications** – These applications use the internet to send text messages, documents, images, and video and audio messages to other users of the same application.

When using an application in a closed environment, where we are communicating with a single login (meeting), it is okay to use our name and share images. However, if we are using the application in a shared environment, where we have followers who are able to view the postings, then we do not mention our membership, nor that of any of our followers.

### **Podcasts**

When podcasts of speakers are posted on OA websites, it is important to practice the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions. To protect the anonymity of the speaker and keep the level of celebrity in check, it is suggested that fictitious names be used, reminding us to place “principles over personalities.” When posting recordings, list by topic rather than by speaker.

If speaker names are listed, do not use full names; use only first names or first names with last initials. Before posting a taped speaker, review the recording for Tradition breaks, especially anonymity. If an issue arises, consulting with the speaker may allow for the recording to be edited and the share posted.

**Social Networks** – Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, pictures, posts, activities, events, and interests with people in their network.

### **Overeaters Anonymous Public Outreach on Social Networks**

Although OA members carry the message of OA, the World Service Office is responsible for the production and distribution of all worldwide communications. Service bodies are encouraged to post WSO announcements on their local websites or create links to [oa.org](http://oa.org) and any social media pages that the WSO creates. All forms of social media are an opportunity for public outreach and information.

If a service body chooses to create such an account, it is encouraged to keep the account free of all personal pictures and comments that would reveal the identity of OA members. It is suggested that a disclaimer is put on the page such as “We appreciate that people who like this page are showing support of our Fellowship, but this does not indicate that they are members of Overeaters Anonymous.”

### **Individual Personal Pages on Social Networks**

It is strongly recommended that we not share that we are members of Overeaters Anonymous on our social media accounts. While we may not care who knows we are in OA, we may inadvertently disclose another person’s membership in our posts.

Be careful that posted photos do not reveal that we or others in the photo are at an OA event. Be aware of visible backgrounds, badges, or banners.

Avoid posting an OA flyer on a personal site or talking about OA in a video. If we do post OA information, some may assume, rightly or wrongly, that anyone who likes or supports our site or post is an OA member.

### **Social Network Groups**

OA members may wish to explore the possibility

of making a private group on a social network site. Such a group would be password protected and individuals join by invitation only. Privacy policies for social network sites are often changed. It is important that the members feel the security of the group is adequate. They need to be aware that there is a risk to their anonymity when using social media. It is recommended that the group read the privacy policies of the site regularly to ensure the group remains private.

Some social media sites are just for sharing information between select friends. This type of site is a good one to use as an information page. Other websites may offer networking forums and social groups, but they also have a product to sell. On this type of site, there is a chance of the message of OA being confused with that of the website. While we are free to participate on such sites, it is not a good idea to use the OA name or logo in any way. It could be mistaken that OA is in some way affiliated with and promoting the site and its products.

Using a social network site to let people know about OA is a great way to inform the public that OA exists. It doesn’t have to be complicated. Just a page that gives the name and purpose of OA with a link to the Fifteen Questions from the OA website page “Take the OA Quiz” ([oa.org/quiz](http://oa.org/quiz)) may attract interest.

### **USE OF OA NAME AND LOGO**

OA, Overeaters Anonymous, and the OA logo are registered trademarks, and all OA literature is copyrighted. The OA name, logo, and literature should be used for OA group– and service body– related sites only. Permission is required to use the logo or OA literature in any medium, including in print or electronic materials. For complete information, visit the “Copy Requests” page on the OA website ([oa.org/guidelines-meetings/copy-requests](http://oa.org/guidelines-meetings/copy-requests)).

**A good idea to remember about anonymity in all environments, digital or otherwise, is to never share anything that you would not want to appear on the front page of the newspaper. While you may keep the anonymity of others, you cannot ensure that other people will keep yours.**

**OA Responsibility Pledge**

Always to extend the hand and heart of OA  
to all who share my compulsion;  
for this I am responsible.

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OA Board-approved

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