

CPC Newsletter

Anonymity – When Principles Meets Practice
Part 1
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Our first encounter with the principle of anonymity as newcomers to A.A. is often simple: we are assured that no one will be told that we've turned to A.A. for help with our drinking. Soon after, we might learn that while all of us are free to disclose (or not disclose) our AA membership in our personal lives, no AA member should ever reveal his or her identity as an AA member through any public media.

But as we "grow in understanding and effectiveness" we may encounter situations where the practice of this vital spiritual principle requires deeper consideration than a simple yes or no.

A member recently ran into one such situation. "I'm a sober member of AA. I'm also a social worker in a big city," she shared with the Public Information coordinator at GSO during a recent phone call. "That means I'm required by law to report any situation in which the safety or welfare of a child is in jeopardy." This member (who asked that her name be withheld so as not to identify the group or individuals who were involved) has been sober awhile, and she knows that when participating in AA she is doing so in a nonprofessional capacity. But when she was sitting in a meeting and another woman, visibly intoxicated, arrived with a toddler in her arms, her professional radar went up. "I didn't say anything during the meeting," she said "but the car keys in the intoxicated woman's hands couldn't be ignored."

As soon as the meeting ended, the member spoke quietly with a few other members of the group. One of them knew the child's father, and a call was placed to him. The member then let the woman know she needed to make a second call: this one to 911. "I've been in these situations before outside of AA, so I knew how to approach it. The professionals who arrived were calm and helpful. They explained to the woman that they were there to help her get medical attention, and she agreed she needed help. When the Child's father arrived to pick up the child – he was a few months sober himself – everyone breathed easier knowing that the safety of all involved had been addressed to the best of our ability."

This member said it also helped to discuss the situation afterward with some of the group's other newcomers. "We knew it could be confusing," she said, "so we took the time to explain that our spiritual principles don't overrule the laws of our community." (This same principle has been covered before in a previous article "AA and the Law" in the Fall 2010 issue of Box 4-5-9.)

Yours in service, CPC Committee.

Part 2 of this article will follow in the February Newsletter issue.