

# ***ASCA Meeting Guidebook*** ***or Ongoing Education Reader***

The *ASCA Meeting Guidebook, or Ongoing Education Reader*, 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 guidebook, especially as members raise questions and ask for additional clarification.

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## 1. The Heart of the ASCA Meeting Guidelines

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, to humiliate, or to hurt.

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### *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 s/he 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 (a) 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 askew.

To summarize, the heart of our ASCA Guidelines serves 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.**

ASCA—Adult Survivors of Child Abuse—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 s/he is 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. Outside of official meeting business, i.e., co-facilitators conferring with each other or with other members of the ASCA meeting group concerning ASCA meeting business, participants should not be contacting each other unless explicit permission has been specifically given by the person being contacted. 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 telephone support list, whereby volunteers list their name and telephone number 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 telephone number and calls the person several weeks later. The telephone list is only active for a week. Many people do not place their name and number 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 through 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 to each other reciprocal support and respect. 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. Alcohol and drugs, as well as food, work, etc., are often used by survivors to lessen and numb the pain. We sometimes use them 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 not 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. We should try to come to our ASCA meetings not only unaltered by chemical substances but also free from anything else that would tend to alter or numb our mood or feelings.



***Guideline #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.***

ASCA focuses on issues directly pertinent to our recovery from being abused physically, sexually, emotionally, and/or neglected as a child. 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 of 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 his/her 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 the guideline to explore or explain the type of abusive behavior, how often it occurred, the reasons, circumstances, etc. The guideline only permits a very brief, clear, succinct note of basic facts.

Safety and focus are the two primary reasons for this guideline. ASCA meetings are for a community of survivors coming together. Therefore, the common good always



preempts individual needs. Also, the focus on recovery from child abuse in ASCA is 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
- to speak in a way that people can “take-in” what you are saying
- to 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 a stretch of the guidelines. At the same time, we open ourselves up to support and assistance by the co-facilitators to keep us on track. Everyone in the room—sharers, co-facilitators, and listening members—is all rooting for us, 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 by 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 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 feels and is experienced by the meeting members as inappropriate, unhelpful, 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 is unhelpful in our meetings. Often, the intensity of a sharer's rebuttal to a co-facilitator's intervention is an indication of his or her 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, is a feeling, 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 can not 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 he/she needs 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](mailto: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, no evaluation, no 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 in 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 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 the only type of feedback permitted in our meetings. In ASCA, we define *supportive comments* as statements that are **empathetic, nurturing, encouraging, affirming** and/or **validating**. Supportive feedback is not a time to give a mini-share. It is an opportunity to say something briefly and crisply that is directly supportive to 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 receiver of the supportive feedback will sense that he or she has been heard. Feeling heard is in and of itself supportive.

- 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 is not

saying anything that is negative.

- Supportive feedback is not saying something positive and then adding an if, and, or but. For example, “I think that you are doing a wonderful job, 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 you might think and how you might think that the sharer could be doing things better is irrelevant when focusing on giving supportive feedback. When we offer supportive feedback, it needs to stay totally within the **empathizing, nurturing, encouraging, affirming, and/or validating** realms.

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.

### **Empathy**

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

- *What you described must have been difficult and painful for you.*
- *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 that what you did took a lot of courage. Thank you for sharing that.*
- *I liked the way you handled that situation.*
- *I feel inspired by your share.*
- *I liked 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 takes a lot of hard work to transform our lives.*
- *I admire you for confronting your abuser the way you did. It must have taken a lot of determination and courage.*

### **Validate**

(To verify and declare that something is true.)

- *What you said made so much sense to me.*
- *I can really appreciate how you are 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 again 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.

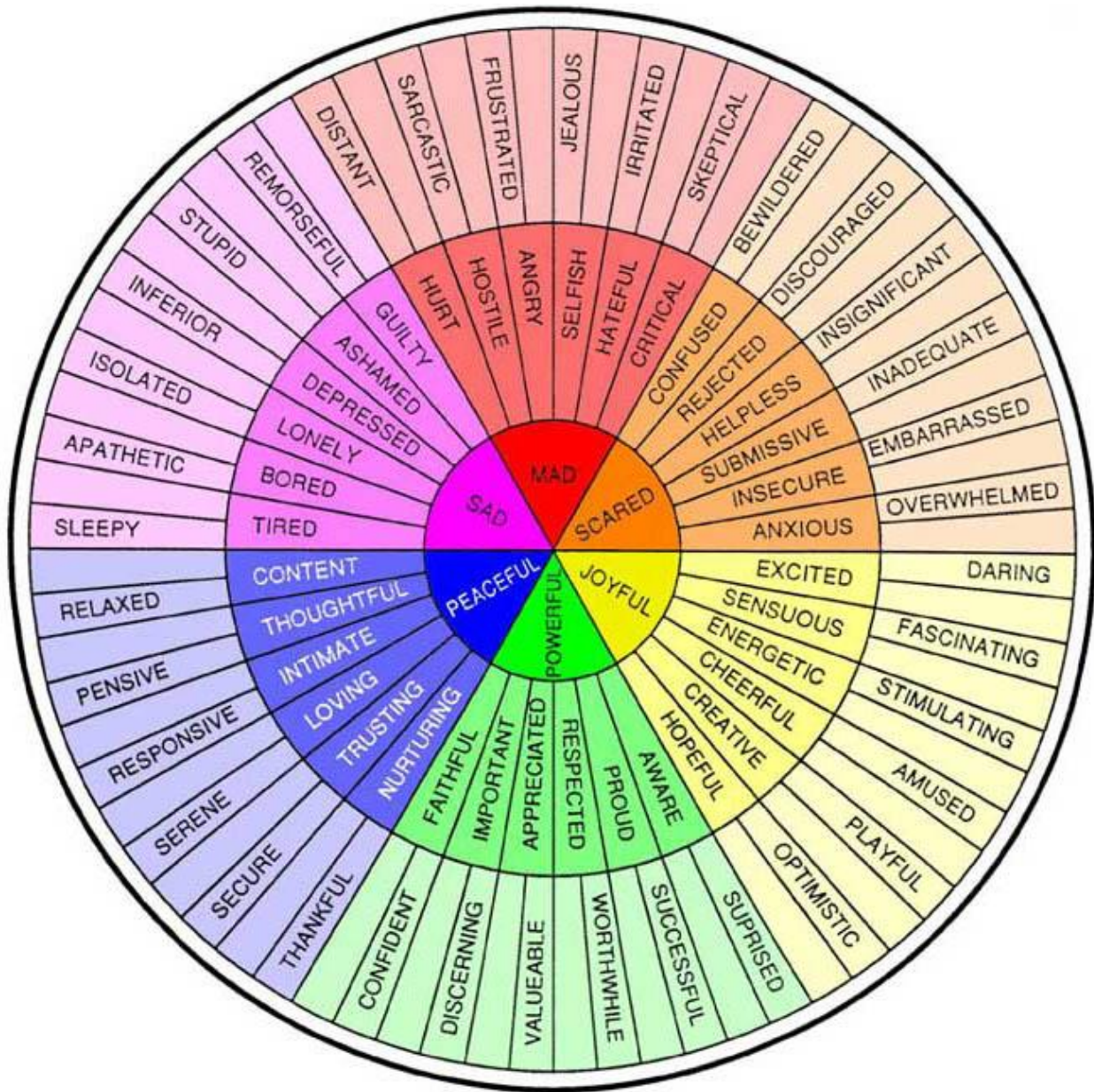
If you find yourself wanting to make an evaluative comment, think about the impact of the person's share on *you* and the underlying message you want to give. A useful formula to use is "I" followed by a feeling rather than "I" followed by an action. For example, "I feel hopeful..." rather than "I commend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

<b>Feedback Comments</b>	
<b><i>Evaluating (You)</i></b>	<b><i>Describing (Me)</i></b>
"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 most 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 askew, 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 that a participant knowingly and purposefully violates a guideline, the situation needs to be taken seriously. The person needs to reconsider what he/she is doing and if ASCA is appropriate for him/her. ASCA meetings are not group process psychotherapy 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 not a place to act out. It provides a setting 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, or 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 he/she 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 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?



## 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 a turn 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 of supporting your meeting includes 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 money concerns that your meeting needs to address?



## 11. Telephone Support Sign-Up

Many, but not all, ASCA meetings pass around the “Telephone Support Sign-Up” sheet at the beginning and end of the meeting. The 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 numbers of individuals that they want to stay in contact with for 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 his or her time to support another ASCA member in need for one week only.

However, even though a person has volunteered, if his/her circumstances change during the week, he/she has 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 “Telephone Support Sign-Up” procedure operates on the honor system. Names and telephone numbers taken from the list should only be used to request support via the telephone. 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 the meeting membership 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 behavior. Such a person needs assistance that ASCA is not designed to offer. This person needs to be referred to another appropriate program where he/she can receive the necessary help that they seek. If a person is presently perpetrating or has recently perpetrated abuse on a child or teenager, he/she is 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, or 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 share is highly sexualized in nature. To many people within the group, the shares appear more in the service of titillating and harassing rather than to deal with and focus 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 him/herself 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 [Ed.: 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, he or she should be given other local resources that might be useful. The disinvited person should also be told that if he/she tries 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 Training 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 would strongly argue 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,” or “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 some type of lived experience with forgiving or being forgiven by someone.

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](http://ascasupport.org).



## **15. Relevancy of Ongoing Education During Regular ASCA Meetings**

Near the end of the co-facilitators’ ASCA meeting 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 to 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 to 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 massage.

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, 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 Thrive* Manual

The Morris Center's *Survivor to Thrive* 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 Thrive* manual offers an organized way and plan to proceed. It is a discriminating 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 Thrive* manual is available for your use by downloading or ordering a printed bound copy of the manual from our website: [ascasupport.org](http://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 to 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 his or her anger in a way that I 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:

1. 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.
2. 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 his own mind. Stay with the speaker and what he or she is trying to accomplish.
  3. 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" or "This is triggering me" or "This man's or woman's story is frightening me." Wrapping your emotions in words can have the effect of distancing you from them just enough to reduce panic.
  4. 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.
  5. 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, the 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](mailto:info@ascasupport.org) if you have a question. We welcome your inquiries and observations.