

Guidelines for HAMS Support Group Meetings

We have found that the following guidelines are helpful for HAMS support group meetings, whether live, in a chat room, or by email:

1. The tone of discussion in HAMS groups is based on Miller and Rollnick's (2002) Motivational Interviewing--adapted to a peer group setting. We have also benefitted from the descriptions of harm reduction groups found in Tatarsky (2007) and Denning and Little (2011). We avoid being confrontational and encourage people to share as much or as little information as they choose themselves. We let people choose for themselves how to use the group in a manner most beneficial to them. We encourage people to pursue goals which they choose for themselves, and do not attempt to choose goals for them. HAMS supports every positive change from safer drinking to reduced drinking to quitting altogether.
2. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. We realize that arguing with people incites counterarguments and is the sure way to convince people to do the opposite of what we intend. The best way to help people to change is to elicit their own reasons for wanting to change. Sometimes people want a sympathetic listener and words of commiseration and we are happy to supply these as well.
3. Generally telling other people what they ought to do is not nearly as effective as sharing how you solved a problem yourself. Therefore, in most cases it is better to use the first person pronoun "I" and share experiences than to use the second person pronoun "you" and give advice. Of course there are exceptions such as when advice is requested. However, even when a person directly solicits advice it can often be helpful to suggest they do a CBA about the situation in question.
4. HAMS members are always expected to treat each other with mutual respect and never call each other bad names. Meanness of any sort will not be tolerated in HAMS groups and may be subject to disciplinary measures. When people fail to keep to their plans they are quite good enough at beating themselves up and require no outside help.
5. There is no rule against intoxication in HAMS groups; some people would never be able to participate in their first HAMS group if they had to be sober as a condition of coming in. However, members are expected to be well- behaved whether intoxicated or not. In the case of live HAMS meetings we encourage members to see that intoxicated members get home safely and do not drive drunk. People who are disruptive at HAMS meetings may be asked to leave whether they are intoxicated or not.
6. Drinking alcohol always entails some degree of risk. If you have successfully eliminated alcohol-related harms in your life by abstaining from alcohol then we urge you to think very carefully before attempting to resume drinking again. HAMS is NOT a magic bullet which enables everyone to drink all they want with no alcohol-related problems. Rather, HAMS is a set of strategies to help reduce the risks to those who are unable or unwilling to abstain totally from alcohol. However, if you have already decided to drink again and

wish to attempt a controlled drinking program, you are welcome at HAMS because it is far safer to experiment with controlled drinking within the HAMS program than to try it on your own with no guidance at all. Remember, the decision to drink or to abstain is always your own and you are always responsible for your own choices.

7. What HAMS members choose to do on their own time is their own business--this includes dating each other or drinking together. If you find it helpful to avoid drinking with other HAMS members then you are welcome to choose this for yourself as a personal rule.
8. HAMS members cannot read minds or foretell the future. We respect each individual's right to choose their own drinking goal and to pick their own tools and strategies to achieve it. We avoid the AA habit of saying "I used to be just like you" because we realize that everyone changes in their own unique ways as they follow their own unique paths through life.
9. It is up to each individual group how much time they wish to spend on humor and if they wish to discuss issues such as drugs or gambling in addition to alcohol. Some of us find that laughter is the best medicine and opt to mix humor with the serious business of harm reduction. Some groups are open to discussing Off-Topic subjects such as religion or politics whereas other groups choose to avoid these entirely. We remind all groups that On-Topic discussions of alcohol and harm reduction always take precedence over Off Topic discussions and that it is essential to make all newcomers feel welcome. If even one person is made uncomfortable by a certain discussion, we encourage the group to drop this topic and move on to another one.
10. HAMS welcomes cross-talk, members are free to respond to what others have said. No one is forced to speak against their will, lurkers and observers are welcome. However we strive to make sure that everyone gets a chance to talk and that no one monopolizes the floor to him/herself.
11. We respect the right of each individual to put together the components of their own plan which can include medications, supplements, psychotherapy, or what-have-you. Ultimately the decision to use or not use medications is between the individual and their doctor--we do not condone pro-medication or anti-medication browbeatings.
12. Different Strokes for Different Folks. Each individual determines the level of consumption and level of risk that s/he is comfortable with as an individual. We each have different values, different needs, different physiologies and personalities. Only the individual can know how much is too much for him/her self.
13. Apply as Needed. HAMS does not require lifelong meeting attendance. HAMS does not believe that a drinking problem is a "lifelong disease that can only be arrested and never cured". HAMS believes that alcohol problems are maladaptive coping strategies. Dwelling on your old bad habits after they have gotten better is counterproductive. The longer you practice healthy habits the less pull old habits will have on you. People can

attend HAMS meetings when they need help or want to help others. They can also get on with life after their bad habits are in the past--though we do love you to come back and visit and tell us that life is great now.

14. Flexibility is an essential component of harm reduction approaches--it is necessary to adopt new strategies to deal with changing circumstances. That is why these are GUIDELINES rather than absolute RULES. Each HAMS group will develop its own traditions and cultures as it grows and evolves.
15. Democratic Process. Members are welcome to raise issues for a majority vote such as they may arise. Members may raise issues about their local group to the group facilitator who will then put this to a vote in the local group. Members may also raise issues concerning HAMS global policies to the Executive Director or other core officers of the corporation which can then be put to a general membership vote, a board vote, or be directly instantiated by the Executive Director, whichever is in accordance with the corporate bylaws.
16. Sexual harassment and financial scamming is strictly forbidden--there will be no 13th stepping in HAMS. Nor do we tolerate flame wars, trolls, or hurting the feelings of others. Members who violate these guidelines may be subject to censure according to group bylaws. Groups violating these guidelines can be unlisted from the HAMS listings and may be sued if they continue to use the HAMS name. Complaints about facilitators of local groups should be brought to the attention of the HAMS Executive Director or other core officers by a member or members of these local groups so that appropriate disciplinary action may be taken against facilitators guilty of violating HAMS policies in accordance with the corporate bylaws.
17. HAMS members are welcome to participate in other groups such as SMART, SOS, WFS, AA, LifeRing, etc. and they are also welcome to discuss how they find this or any other activity helpful for achieving their drinking goal. HAMS members are also welcome to discuss all books, CDs which they may find helpful as well as activities such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture, etc. HAMS members are NOT restricted to only discussing official HAMS literature. However, acts such as proselytizing for outside groups, browbeating or harassing people for failing to follow the standards of outside groups, or attacking HAMS for taking a harm reduction approach instead of modeling itself on an outside group are unacceptable and may result in disciplinary measures.
18. HAMS has no gurus and no sponsors. People are welcome to be abs buddies or mods buddies if they choose. But playing guru, attempting to make plans for others, or holding one's self up as god almighty are all reasons for disciplinary action

It does not matter how much or how little a person drinks, their drug of choice, their harm reduction goal, their race, color, creed, sex, gender, sexual preference and spelling ability. We strive to meet every person "where they are at". If a person gets drunk every day and their goal choice is to quit drinking and driving but not to drink less--we support that. If a person drinks one glass of wine a week and thinks that is too much and wants to quit alcohol entirely--we

support that. We support the individual in making any positive change which they choose for themselves. HAMS is here to encourage every success and to recognize every positive change, no matter how small. Small steps make for big changes.

*"The warrior who is inflexible
condemns himself to death,
and the tree is easily broken,
which ever refuses to yield.
Thus the hard and brittle will surely fall,
and the soft and supple will overcome."*

--Lao Tze

REFERENCES:

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Miller WR, Rollnick S. (2002). *Motivational Interviewing, Second Edition: Preparing People for Change.* The Guilford Press.

Tatarsky A. (2007). *Harm Reduction Psychotherapy: A New Treatment for Drug and Alcohol Problems.* Jason Aronson, Inc.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the board of directors on 03/02/12.

Revision approved by unanimous vote of the board of directors on March 12 2013.

Further revision approved by unanimous vote of the board of directors on Feb 5, 2014.