New York Inter-Group
WebChat Volunteer Handbook

“When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.”

Inter-Group Association of A.A. of New York
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info@nyintergroup.org
https://www.nyintergroup.org
Dear WebChat Volunteer:

New York Inter-Group now offers, at select times, the ability to contact us via chat. At select times, a “Click To Chat” button will appear on the bottom right corner of all pages of the https://www.nyintergroup.org website. Below are images of the pop-up chat messaging window and chat button.

This handbook will help you handle the important job of responding to WebChat requests. The purpose of introducing chat communication to the website is to provide yet another immediate method of contact for the alcoholic who still suffers.

Please review the contents. If you have any general questions about assisting those who contact us, please ask the Hospital Desk Volunteer or any Staff Member. If you have questions, technical or otherwise, about how WebChat works, or the WebChat volunteer program, please contact: webchat@nyintergroup.org.

Most importantly, you are extending a helping hand. You will sometimes be the first one to bring hope to WebChat users and say the things they are willing to hear. Because of your recovery experience, you are one of the most qualified to understand their problems, as it states in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. You
may be the person who starts someone on the path to sobriety. You will also help those in need to find an A.A. meeting near them, or around the world. Remember that we only carry the message “If you want to stop drinking, A.A. is here to help.”

Your primary goal is to refer WebChat users to where they can get help. We try to be sympathetic and understanding.

Thank you for your service.

New York Inter-Group
Upon Arriving For Your Shift, Please

- Check your name off or sign in on the sign-up sheet (not necessary if you’ve signed up using the online calendar)
- Check the bulletin board for announcements of group notices, location changes and upcoming events
- Familiarize yourself with the meeting book or online meeting schedule at: https://www.nyintergroup.org/meetings/.
- Introduce yourself to others on your shift in the “volunteers-webchat” channel.

Before Leaving, Please

- Close browser tab / window with Slack WebChat session (please do not logout).
- Leave desk neat, as you found it (or better 😊).
- Consider signing up for a future shift.

Office Policies

- Please do not bring children for your volunteer shift.
- Except for Service Animals, please do not bring pets into NYIG.
- No volunteer can remain in the office alone. 2 minimum volunteers are required to keep the office open.
Getting Started With WebChat

- Chat is powered by a messaging platform called *Slack*. On an Inter-group desktop computer, open a web browser window and enter the URL:

  https://nyintergroup.slack.com

- That should bring you to a page that looks similar to this:

  ![Slack Interface](image)

- If you do not see a page that looks like this, or if you are being prompted to “Sign in to Inter-group…” please ask an Inter-Group staff member to assist you. If none are available, please try an Inter-Group computer at a different desk.

- If you see an alert banner that says “Slack needs your permission to enable desktop notifications”, please make sure you click the “enable desktop notifications” link and set to “Allow”. This is to ensure you’ll be notified every time a new message comes in.
- On the left hand side of the screen are a list of “Channels” and “Direct Messages”. Channels are where groups of users can communicate. Messages sent in a channel are visible to anyone who has access to the channel. Direct messages are private, and are visible to the sender and recipient only.

- The “general-webchat” channel is where WebChat messages come in and where you’ll respond to them.

- The “volunteers-webchat” channel is for asking questions or sharing information about WebChat or your volunteering commitment. For example, if you need to leave your shift early, you’ll want to let other WebChat volunteers know via this channel.

- The “quickref-webchat” channel is a repository for useful tips or frequently accessed information that is useful during your volunteer shift. For example, the address and phone number for NY Inter-group is in this channel, making it convenient to copy and paste into messages.
WebChat Messages

- When you select the “general-webchat” channel, a list of messages should come up on your screen:

- Each Webchat message from a user will be broken out into their own “thread”. A thread is a conversation between a WebChat user and any volunteer in the channel who responds to them.

- The most recent threads will appear on the bottom. All threads are labelled from “Smallchat”. Replies are the number of messages from any person in the thread.

- The location (e.g., “Mahopac, New York, US” in the image above) is the approximate location of the device / computer the WebChat user is using.

- Threads can be read and responded to on the right-hand side of the page. To access a thread, place your mouse over the replies, wait til it says “View thread”, then click.
- Before responding to a thread, you must claim it as yours. To do this, place your mouse over the thread, and click the “Add reaction” button. Choose an emoji that is not being used by another volunteer, so that you can be uniquely identified (and other volunteers won’t respond to a user you’re assisting).
- Please do not use the “ghost” or “speak no evil” emojis, since those are reserved for special purposes (more on this later).

- In the thread box on the right-hand side of the page, you’ll see user information at top, text that the user has sent, the reply box at bottom.

- “url” is the page that the user started the chat session on.

- “referrer” is the page the user was on before the “url” page.

- This information can sometimes be useful in helping a user.

- The “Mute” button turns off notifications for this thread.

- Please don’t click the “IP Ban” button. It’s a staff-only feature.

- Please don’t select the “Also send to general-webchat” checkbox.

- Your responses will appear in the thread box once you Send them.
Do’s and Don’t’s

- **DO** generally respond with “Hi, thanks for reaching out to Alcoholics Anonymous. How can we help?” That language can be found in the “quickref-webchat” channel, so it’s easy to find, copy, and paste.

- **DO** encourage callers to go to a meeting – Our primary purpose is to help callers find a meeting.

- **DO** limit the time of your chat to a few minutes.

- **DO** encourage family members to call Al-Anon. In keeping with our Primary Purpose, we only talk to alcoholics. Non-alcoholics are better served by contacting Al-Anon.

- **DO** allow other volunteers to claim their share of WebChat threads. Give everyone an opportunity to do service.

- **DON’T** give medical, psychological or financial advice.

- **DON’T** offer advice on problems other than alcohol.

- **DON’T** give out a member's name or phone number. If you have reason to refer to another alcoholic by name, use their first name only.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

If a WebChat user is trolling you ("Posting provocative messages or comments in a chatroom or online forum with disruptive intent"*), is abusive, or makes you feel uncomfortable, stop communication immediately and change the thread emoji from yours to the “speak no evil” emoji.

* Oxford Reference "A Dictionary of Social Media"
Tips

- Remember that WebChat threads will stay in the “general-webchat” channel, even after chat functionality has been disabled on the website, or the user closes their web browser.

- Don’t hesitate to ask for assistance in the “volunteers-webchat” channel or by email: webchat@nyintergroup.org.

- If a WebChat user stops communication before you’re able to assist them, please change the thread emoji from yours to the “ghost” emoji.
Being an Effective WebChat Volunteer

Examples of the types of contact we receive:

1. Request for meeting information. Meetings can be looked up online via the Inter-group website: https://www.nyintergroup.org/meetings/. There are also meeting guides located in the binders on each desk.

2. Drunks who want help. Conversations should last no more than a couple of minutes with someone who is intoxicated. If the chat user is seeking help, encourage them to attend a meeting. Answer questions freely about how A.A. works. You can also offer to have a 12th Step contact call them back. If they agree, complete a 12th Step contact form and give it to the Information Desk. Do not give the contact names and numbers out to chat respondent.

3. Non-alcoholics seeking information about A.A. or other 12 Step programs. The yellow sheets in the binders located on each desk contain useful phone numbers. If the caller is a student, social worker, etc. who is looking to attend an A.A. meeting, give them only “open” AA meetings.

4. People who are in recovery but just need to be in contact another alcoholic. Be sympathetic but encourage them to go to a meeting to share with other alcoholics. Remember our primary purpose is to get them to an A.A. meeting. Please do not have long chat conversations with people. Politely explain that you must help others, but will be happy to refer them to a nearby meeting.

5. Inquiries about “Bridging the Gap”, our program to help those making the transition out of a treatment facility by using an A.A. member as a meeting contact. The Information Desk has details on this program.

6. People looking for a meeting in another part of the country or foreign countries. Directories are located on the round table in the center of the volunteer room. Web searches engines are also an excellent resource to find Inter-groups or Central Offices in other areas.

7. Someone is at a listed meeting but the meeting is not there. Check the bulletin board to see if there is a notice about this group. If not, take down the name, time, day, and location of the meeting and give it to the Information Desk.

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Desk. They will in turn give it to a Staff Member for follow-up. Refer the chat user to another nearby meeting.

8. If you encounter situations that make you uncomfortable or you don’t know how to handle, ask the Information Desk or a more experienced volunteer to help.

Difficult situations you may encounter may include:

1. Someone seeking a detox.

2. A user who is abusive or unsound.

3. A user who is suicidal. Please refer them to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which has its own chat service. The url should be bookmarked in the web browser or go to: https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/

4. A user who is threatening to others, or in desperate need of help.

5. Users looking for money, food, transportation, housing etc.
New York Intergroup House Rules

Although primarily staffed by volunteers, Inter-Group is a Business and as such must comply with all governing laws. Volunteers must conduct themselves as if they are in a business environment. This includes respect for all volunteers and staff. Discrimination and derogatory comments will not be tolerated.

If you feel uncomfortable about conversations around you or comments made to you, immediately report this to a Staff Member. An Incident Report will be provided to you. We take all such matters seriously.

In order to avoid a ‘Hostile Work Environment”, types of behavior that are not acceptable include:

- Use of derogatory terms for people, including slang terms.
- Swearing.
- Reading pornographic material in print or on the internet.
- Commenting on people’s race, religion, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.
- Touching others other than a handshake if offered.
- Having a personal call that includes any of the above that can be heard by others.
Literature Sales

Inter-Group sells only A.A. conference approved literature.

The Literature Room is open for sales as follows:

**Monday - Friday: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm Saturday: 10:00 am to 4:00 pm**

The Hospital Desk volunteer can sell meeting books when the Literature Room is closed.

Anyone can order literature & coins online for pick-up or to ship at [www.nyintergroup.org](http://www.nyintergroup.org)

Office Hours & Staff

*The Office is open 7/365 from 9am – 10pm.*

*Office Telephone Number: 212-647-1680*

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Message forms are located on the desks. Please take thorough messages for Staff Members and leave them in the appropriate message boxes.