



EDUCATIONAL MOMENTS READER

Updated May 2017

Summary

This is a compilation of educational news articles originally written by Dr. George Bilotta (former Executive Director of The Norma J. Morris Center) on the nuances of ASCA meetings

For more information, contact us at info@ascasupport.org

Educational Moments Reader

(updated May 2017)

Table of Contents

Contents

The Heart of the ASCA Meeting Guidelines	3
Sharing Basics	7
Benefits of Volunteering and Preparing for the Opening 15-Minute Share	9
Cross-Talk: What It Is, What It Is Not	10
Co-facilitator Interventions	11
Art of Supportive Feedback	12
Supporting Your ASCA Meeting	14
Money & Donations	14 ¹⁵
Telephone Support Sign-Up	15 ¹⁶
Dis-Inviting an ASCA Participant	16
Purpose of Periodic Business Meetings	17
Offering Feedback	17 ¹⁸
Selecting Helpful Topics and Accompanying Handout Materials for Rotation C ASCA Meetings	18
Relevancy of Ongoing Education During Regular ASCA Meetings	19
Preparing for an ASCA Meeting	20
Conflicts Within a Meeting	20 ²¹
Using the Survivor to Thriver Manual	21
Sharing that Connects Sharing that Disconnects	21 ²²
Handling Triggers During Meetings	22
Anything Confusing or Puzzling You about ASCA Meetings?	23

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, are 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 propose to provide guidance and safety. They are not meant to be like harsh blocks of cement to impede, to humiliate or to hurt.

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. Tending to point us in a direction, rather than being concrete, these guidelines 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.

Good will means placing our heart in a mode of receptive willingness. Often the person we perceive as breaking the guideline is doing the best s/he can. The person might be unfamiliar with or confused about the guideline. The participant might be overwhelmed at the moment. It does not help to get angry 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 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 you find unsettling, it would be helpful to discuss the situation with the Co-facilitators following the conclusion of the meeting. Often this kind of follow-up 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 support and safety. We help each other 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, Adults 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 happen when a person does not have clear recollections of being sexually or physically abused. Many people only think of childhood abuse as physical or sexual abuse, and forget about their emotional abuse or neglect. However, many people can readily identify patterns of childhood emotional abuse when they stop and examine their childhood history. Some people who suspect they may have been abused sexually and/or physically, begin with what they remember - a pattern of emotional abuse. Some of these individuals eventually unfold recollections of 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 given by the person being contacted. Many friendships can form between long-term ASCA members. This is a wonderful and natural evolution of being part of a long-term support 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 meetings pass around a telephone support list every week. Volunteers can list their names and telephone numbers to be a support contact for that 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 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 make a social engagement. Though ASCA does not have any rules or guidelines concerning socializing outside of the ASCA meeting, pursuing someone for a date should only be done if it is perfectly clear (without ambiguity) that someone wants 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. Though we meet potential partners in a wide variety of situations, 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 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 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 and work, etc. are often used by survivors to lessen and numb the pain. We sometime 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.

To attend an ASCA meeting under the influence of alcohol or a drug not prescribed by a physician is not helpful nor respectful to either self 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 from chemical substances but also 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 try to assist individual survivors who are presently or who have in the past perpetrated abuse on others. Other programs exist to help individuals with perpetrator type behavior to 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 fact 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. The most common form of abuse by some adult survivors is 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. 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**. It is not permissible to elaborate on the abuse in any way when acknowledging such past behavior.

It is not okay to relate in any detail the past abusive behavior. Again, it is okay to briefly 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, 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, the reasons, circumstances, etc. The guideline only permits a very brief, clear, succinct note of basic fact.

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 the individual need. 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.

Sharing Basics

Occasionally, members inquire into the parameters surrounding what can or can not be shared in an ASCA meeting. Though 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.

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 story of childhood abuse, the negative effects on our lives. We also share to relate our successes, our strategies, our growth and unfolding as human beings who have been impacted by childhood abuse.

Yet we share in the context of a community of ASCA members, people who have been through similar experiences. Thus our shares are meant not only as a catharsis and an opportunity to gain insight and support for ourselves, but also to connect with others through our sharing. 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 that they should be permitted to share anything they want and in any manner that 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 experiences of this happening in a meeting. We feel unsafe, confused and frightened. At this point a meeting ceases to be helpful, and has turned counterproductive. Share guidelines are not meant to control. 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 liberate us. 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 for support and assistance by the Co-facilitators to keep us on track. Everyone in the room - sharer, co-facilitators and listening members are 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, the flavor by 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 of my share, the style of my share, its tone has turned threatening. The share is no longer productive and helpful. Though it may feel cathartic for me, it has undermined 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, its predictability, then the share must come to an immediate halt, usually by an intervention of a Co-facilitator.

Another example to illustrate manner, flavor, style, 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, lacking in 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 titillate or provoke others within the meeting. We all can 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, from the pathological part of self.

This type of a share usually seems okay in content, but rather the way, the manner, the flavor of 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 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 provocative. 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/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. Just because I may feel uncomfortable, uneasy, 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 a spirit of trusting the Co-facilitators, 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 good will is helpful when participating in ASCA meetings.

Discussing *Share Basics* might take several meetings to fully explore. Hopefully genuine discussion about sharing will lead to more helpful sharing for all participants, as well as less need for interventions by the Co-facilitators.

Benefits of Volunteering and Preparing for the Opening 15-Minute Share

Volunteering to present the opening 15-minute share in an ASCA meeting is a wonderful opportunity to delve into a particular aspect of our recovery and to enjoy, even luxuriate in some positive feedback from a caring and supportive community. Preparing our 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; Rotation B - one of the particular Steps; or Rotation 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 B, review the Step in the Survivor to Thriver manual and work on some of the exercises to massage your memory. If rotation C, ask the co-facilitator for the topic description and article, which will orient you and stimulate your thinking during the week.

Second, we can enhance our insights and emotional release, if we spend small periods of time during the week reflecting on what we want to share. We have opportunities during the day to think about what we want to share. By reflecting 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. If we can spend a little time preparing for our share during the week, we will 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 and you can always telephone or e-mail THE MORRIS CENTER at

info@ascasupport.org. We are all here to help each other be successful in our recovery efforts.

Cross-Talk: What It Is, What It Is Not

The topic of cross-talk often comes up, especially for new comers to ASCA meetings. During the shares no cross-talk is permitted. According to the instructions read by the co-facilitator during every meeting prior to the tag shares, cross-talk is defined as "referring to another person in anyway 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 is to listen and take-in, to internally resonate and empathize. The group becomes a respectful, receptive vessel receiving whatever a member is sharing. There is no judgement, no evaluation, no opinion, no advice.

Second, responding to the speaker happens only during the formal feedback period for the meeting. Participants can also "respond directly to a speaker" in a respectful manner following the closure of the meeting. Referring to the group (for example by using the word "you all" or "you guys") or an individual in the group during our feedback and shares is also considered crosstalk. By following the guidelines on feedback and comments during the shares of the meeting, we help foster a more trusting environment.

Third, the purpose of sharing is to focus on ourselves and what we are feeling and working on. When we begin a share by referring to or referencing someone else in the group, we are refocusing on that person rather than focusing on one's self. If permitted to persist, this could have a negative influence on the ASCA meeting dynamic.

Fourth, perhaps the biggest slip for new comers concerning the no cross-talk guideline is the spontaneous acknowledging of a previous speaker and how the speaker has stirred them. From one perspective, this seemingly innocent gesture of acknowledgement 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 people may 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, and any interventions made by the co-facilitators.

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 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 are fellow survivors doing the best they can. They deserve our support, understanding and cooperation.

There are two purposes for an intervention. The first purpose is to stop a 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.

Usually, a guideline is crossed unknowingly but sometimes a guideline is crossed on purpose to provoke. The more common intervention is with a participant who is doing something unknowingly, out of inexperience with our guidelines. Sometimes a participant may ask a question while giving a share to which the 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 of each other. An ASCA meeting is not a place to act out. It is a setting to receive and give support. A person who is not willing or is not capable of adhering to our ASCA guidelines and format, is not a suitable candidate for participating 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 guidelines and spirit of ASCA.

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-facilitator following the conclusion of the meeting.

Your ASCA meeting may want to plan regular business meetings 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 upon. The membership might discuss how to be supportive and cooperative during an intervention. What is helpful? What is unhelpful?

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 within our daily lives. With focus, effort and practice, most people can master the basics of supportive feedback.

For our ASCA meetings, supportive feedback helps to build community within the meeting, adding a dimension of cohesiveness, understanding, empathy and compassion. For our daily lives, the art of supportive feedback is an essential communication skill. Increasing our ability to provide supportive feedback enhances the quality of our relationships first with our individual selves and secondly with others such as family, co-workers and friends. We learn to handle others and ourselves gently, respectfully and carefully.

Supportive feedback is a conscious and deliberate way of approaching others and ourselves. It is saying to others 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, and/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 anything, or find something positive to say like, "I hear your struggle. I understand your hurt. I understand your confusion, frustration," etc. The receiver of the supportive feedback will sense that he/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 a person instructions to do or not to do something.
- Supportive feedback is not making a negative judgement.
- 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 from aspects of the five categories. Some examples of supportive feedback using the five categories that comprise supportive feedback follow.

Empathy

(identifying with, understanding, appreciating the other person's feelings and situation)

What you described must have been difficult and painful for you.

It is 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 you were courageous to do what you did.

I think you are just wonderful.

I liked the way you handled that situation.

You demonstrated a powerful presence.

I am proud of you.

I liked what you said.

Encourage

(supporting with inspiring words)

I think you are doing a great job.

I have confidence in you.

You seem to have a handle on what you need to do.

Affirm

(making a positive statement that is true)

Your forthrightness is amazing.

It takes a lot of hard work to transform our lives.

You seem to be doing a great job at ...

What you did was brave.

Confronting your abuser, the way you did took determination and courage.

I admire you for doing that.

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 thoughtful and helpful.*

Also, even though a supportive comment has already been made by someone else, repeating the supportive comments in one's own words is helpful for the presenter to hear again from another person. We often need to hear the same support 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 underlining supportive feedback is to be supportively positive.

Supporting Your ASCA Meeting

Your ASCA meeting could use your ongoing support in several basic ways. An ASCA meeting relies on the good will of its participants. We support the meeting 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 at functioning as a Co-facilitator. 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 primary 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 out due to lack of membership. If you have the time and energy, you might also consider helping the Morris Center's Board members by joining a committee. The Morris Center is a volunteer organization. Without interested and enthusiastic people coming forward and donating their time, energy and talents, our organization would soon fold.

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.

Money & Donations

Many people feel awkward and uncomfortable discussing money and finances. These feelings can derive from various experiences with money. We may feel somewhat inexperienced around money matters. We might have had negative experiences with money, or we may not have had sufficient resources for our personal needs and wants. We may have felt used around 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 and talk about money. In reference to paying for

services that assist in our recovery from childhood abuse, some of us may 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 - through no fault of our own. We may feel resentful that medical insurance generally does not cover our recovery expenses, and that our perpetrators seldom make amends.

In the *community based* ASCA meetings, the basket is passed around at every meeting for donations. These donations are used to pay the rent, to list the meeting on the web site and/or Meetup, and for materials like printing handouts, etc. In provider based meetings, however, participants pay a set fee to the provider of the meeting. 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 discuss meeting finances in an open manner. 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?

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 via phone to other members of the ASCA meeting who may need additional support during the week. The telephone list is active for that week only.

However, even though a person signed up on the list, 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.

Dis-Inviting an ASCA Participant

Under certain extreme conditions the co-facilitators in conjunction with the meeting membership have the option, authority and responsibility to dis-invite and prohibit a survivor from participating in ASCA meetings. This has happened only a few times since ASCA meetings first started in 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 dis-inviting someone from participating in ASCA meetings. First, the individual refuses to observe the meeting guidelines.

The second condition that triggers the process of dis-inviting 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. Usually the 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 and focus with 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 example may involve a participant harassing a member(s) of the group, maybe for dating purposes. The person's boundaries are poor. The person may be taking advantage of the vulnerability of a group member(s). The person may try to ingratiate him/herself to 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 between themselves and with other senior members of the ASCA meeting. To help clarify, gain perspective and strategize options and possible interventions, the co-facilitators might consider contacting the Morris Center to discuss the situation. The ASCA Co-Facilitator Yahoo Group online can also be a wonderful resource and helpful ally in such situations.

Co-facilitators always have the authority to ask a participant to leave a meeting at any time. To enact the process of dis-inviting and prohibiting the person from future ASCA meetings, the co-facilitators should also have a business meeting after dis-inviting a member to answer any concerns or questions. When a person is officially dis-invited from attending ASCA meetings he/she should be given other local resources that might be useful. The dis-invited person should also be told that if he/she should try to attend an ASCA meeting in the future, the co-facilitators have the right to immediately call Security or the police to have the person removed.

The process of dis-inviting is a rare occurrence. Because most ASCA meetings are open to the general public, a person who is not an appropriate candidate for ASCA may sometimes come to a meeting. Though the process of dis-inviting may raise anxiety, fears, and other distressing feelings, it is also an opportunity 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.

Purpose of Periodic Business Meetings

In the instructions to Co-facilitators found in the *ASCA Meeting Format and Support Materials* on page 16, it notes that ASCA meetings benefit from having regular business meetings to discuss issues and to make local meeting based decisions (for example, on how to spend any surplus money collected through donations). Some ASCA meetings hold business meetings monthly. Others have a business meeting once a quarter or “as needed”.

ASCA business meetings are a way for 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 up areas of concern or decisions that need to be made concerning the meeting, paying meeting bills, need for new Co-facilitators to take a turn at running the meeting, etc.

The most important function of holding ongoing business meetings is to discuss concerns and address things, which need to be taken care of for the continued success and health of the meeting. When was the last time your meeting held a business meeting?

Offering Feedback

The *ASCA Newsletters* provide articles that are thought provoking, and worthy of your time and reflection. We try to offer our readers material that will be helpful in their ongoing process of recovery from childhood abuse. Offering feedback can be helpful. Your feedback to THE MORRIS CENTER's Board of Directors and to the newsletter editor helps us hone the *ASCA News* so it can be responsive to the needs and desires of our readership.

Here are some ideas concerning how to offer helpful feedback to the editor. The more specific you can be, the more helpful your comments will be:

1. Did you find anything in an article that was inaccurate, wrong and/or not factual?
2. Did you experience anything that was confusing, misleading, poorly stated?
3. Did you agree/disagree with a point of view expressed in any of the articles? With what do you agree/disagree? Why?
4. Did you find any article or part of an article particularly helpful or unhelpful? What was helpful? What was unhelpful?

5. Did you experience any particular feelings and/or thoughts you would like to share?
6. Can you think of a way to make the ideas presented within any of the articles more readable? What are your thoughts?

You can offer feedback by sending an e-mail to THE MORRIS CENTER's Board of Directors at info@ascasupport.org.

Selecting Helpful Topics and Accompanying Handout Materials for Rotation C ASCA Meetings

One of the duties of the Co-facilitators is to decide upon appropriate topics and materials for Rotation C meetings.

The Co-facilitators and the meeting members can choose one of the suggested topics collected in our Meeting Resources web page, or research other topics that may be more helpful for their particular 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 basic guideline that may be useful when selecting a topic. Topics need to be inclusive for the entire meeting membership. For example, to select the topic of incest might leave out some members of the group, since not all ASCA participants have experienced incest. Or to choose the topic of suicide might again leave some members out, 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 the topic of “resistance” is capable of including everyone. Participants may or may not identify with the writer of the article, but they can identify with the basic topic itself. So whether a person agrees, disagrees, likes, dislikes, applauds or yawns concerning the written material on the topic, everyone can address the topic in their shares.

Sometimes a topic can be broadened sufficiently to include everyone. For example, there is a school of survivorship, which would strongly argue that to forgive the abuser is an important aspect of recovery. Yet, there is another school of thought that would argue that forgiveness is actually a form of denial. Irrespective of where you stand on this topic, forgiveness is 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? or Forgiveness: What Are the Pros and Cons? could stimulate an in-dept sharing among the members. Every ASCA member has some type of experience with forgiving someone and being forgiven by someone. With a little thoughtfulness, most topics can be broadened to be inclusive and helpful.

Topics are not debates. The idea behind the topic rotation is to provide an opportunity to review and discuss material important to recovery from childhood abuse, which may not be covered in the 21-Steps or 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 members. Some meetings routinely spend a few moments in their business meetings developing a list of potential topics for future meetings. Co-facilitators might find this procedure helpful and supportive.

A final recommendation in choosing topics is to raise some discussion questions for meeting members to consider in their shares. The questions should be open ended and general enough to permit maximum participation and inclusiveness.

If you have a suggestion for a topic, let the ASCA News Editor know. The editor's contact information is always listed on the last page of the ASCA News. Many topics presented in the ASCA News come through suggestions or requests made by ASCA participants.

Relevancy of Ongoing Education During Regular ASCA Meetings

Within the Co-facilitators ASCA Meeting script, there is a note/suggestion that during the announcements section of the meeting, to spend a few moments on what we call Ongoing Education. Some meetings conduct Ongoing Education at almost every meeting. Other meetings use this as an opportunity to do an intervention that applies to more than one group member – for example, if more than one person went overtime or veered into cross-talk during that particular meeting.

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 guidelines and procedures.

Third, during the Ongoing Education moments, Co-facilitators can clarify and pre-empt a troubling dynamic they may see emerging within a meeting. For example, the Co-facilitators might use the Ongoing Education moment to discuss what cross-talk is all about. Established meetings might tend to become a little lax in observing certain guidelines. This opens the door to confusion and future anxiety for participants. Consistency is important to keeping our meetings safe and supportive.

Finally, reviewing various aspects of the ASCA meeting can be reassuring to participants. When Co-facilitators are perceived as being helpful, proactive, and thoughtful about what is going on in a meeting, members, especially the newcomers, tend to feel reassured, secure, and safe.

The bottom-line is that it can be helpful to spend a few minutes at every meeting, during the Announcements section, to discuss various aspects of the ASCA meeting.

Preparing for an ASCA Meeting

There are many different thoughts on how to prepare to participate in an ASCA meeting. One thought is that we should just be spontaneous in the meeting. Another thought is that it can be overwhelming to dwell on the past, especially during the initial phase of recovery from childhood abuse. Just being present and listening to other shares can be emotionally healing.

For participants who feel comfortable and have the time and energy, thinking about what you want to share might assist in reaping more benefits from participating in the meeting. One benefit is that it can keep us in touch with our feelings. Another benefit is that it permits us to recall the past in a safe and focused manner. When we reflect on what we want to talk about at the next ASCA meeting, we can start to gain some insight and emotional resolution.

Some members find it helpful to read over the ASCA Step or Topic during the week, just to keep it fresh in their consciousness. This repeated focusing often unearths a treasure of thoughts and feelings, adding one more piece toward healing.

Your meeting might benefit from spending a little time discussing various strategies on how to prepare for an ASCA meeting. Of course, our strategies depend upon our time and energy levels. There is no single method for preparing. Preparation depends upon where we are in our recovery.

Conflicts Within a Meeting

In many ways, an ASCA meeting is a microcosm of our daily lives, i.e., the manner by 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 an 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, improved communication skills, and a desire to reconnect with the other.

In the past when we have 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 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 into positive, constructive and connecting ways.

Your 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 dealing with difficult situations. Practice does not make us perfect, but it sure helps smooth off the rough edges of life.

Using the Survivor to Thriver Manual

The Morris Center's *Survivor to Thriver* manual was created as an accompaniment to the recovery process for adult survivors of physical, sexual and/or emotional child abuse or neglect. We need to remember, however, that our manual and ASCA is only one of many different and powerful ways we can use to heal our emotional wounds and to move-on with our lives.

The *Survivor to Thriver* manual offers an organized way and plan to proceed. It is a discriminating aid to help us clarify our story of abuse and recovery. It provides exercises that gently challenge us to work through some of our unresolved stuff. The manual is full of practical ways of looking at our past abuse experiences and how we proceed with our recovery.

Sometimes the material will stimulate our recall and jog our memory. In working through the material, we may notice how one memory leads to another, to another, or to an elaboration and clarification of past situations. In many ways the *Survivor to Thriver* manual challenges us to rethink, clarify and acknowledge not only the past, but also our present and future.

Many people who regularly attend ASCA meetings find that their shares become more insightful and fruitful when they work through the material in the manual during the week – either with a fellow ASCA buddy or with their therapists.

The *Survivor to Thriver* manual is available free for your use by downloading the manual from our web site: www.ascasupport.org.

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 connect? 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 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 h/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?

Handling Triggers During Meetings

ASCA meetings give people a chance to share powerful emotions and personal stories that may have been kept locked inside the heart 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 deal with triggers in different ways. If there is any rule it might be that we each come to meetings, as we do to 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/woman's story is

frightening me.” Wrapping your emotions in words can have the effect of distancing yourself 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 a therapist or friend or with the aid of books on the subject. You can also refer to the tips in the “Welcome to ASCA” meeting handout.

Anything Confusing or 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 for a new co-facilitator, the meeting newcomer - and even, perhaps, the 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 or via telephone at 415.937.1854 if you have a question. We welcome your inquiries and observations.