

What is the Practice Group?

The Practice Group is a gathering of people who meet to practice the shared desire to ease unnecessary suffering in our lives, and when possible, in the lives of others. Practicing this shared desire is the group's Primary Purpose.

Anyone may attend the Practice Group regardless of their belief or non-belief in a higher power, their gender identity or lack thereof, age, ethnic heritage, economic status, sexual orientation, national or political identity, or religious affiliation. All are welcome at our meetings and our meetings should always remain a place of safety, diversity, and nonviolence.

No fees are required to attend.

The Practice Group is not allied with any religion, political party, or formal institution. We are apolitical and do not engage in controversies. As a Group, we do not endorse or oppose any causes.

Our hope is that anyone who attends the Practice Group will be warmly welcomed and find us always willing to engage in a shared journey of freeing ourselves and when possible, others, from unnecessary suffering.

What do we mean by 'unnecessary suffering'?

Suffering is different for everyone. What one person considers suffering might be considered tolerable discomfort by another. Furthermore, some suffering may be necessary. For example, a person who suffers from an illness might experience a strengthened immune system once they get better. Childbirth or the grief of losing a loved one could also be considered 'necessary' suffering.

What we mean by unnecessary suffering, are life situations, feelings, behaviors, relationships, and states of mind with which we experience intense prolonged difficulty or feel powerless to change.

How do we DO a practice group?

Right now, this journey is somewhat experimental. Keeping an open flexible mind is important. In our experiment, there are two 'styles of practice' that we will combine.

The first style of practice is the 4 Standards of IofC/MRA/Oxford Group. Once known as the 4 Absolutes these Standards are Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and Love. We will engage these standards by contemplating them and sharing how they are active in our lives, where we struggle with them, and our efforts to improve their use.

The second style of practice is the 12 Step model. Many founding members of the 12 Step Movement, specifically AA, had been members of the church in Gramercy Park, NY where Sam Shoemaker preached Oxford Group principles. The 12 Steps were modifications drawn directly from these early Oxford Group practices.

However, the 12 Step model was designed specifically for treating addictions/compulsive behavior and not everyone suffers from these problems. With a broader approach in mind, we will use a modified version of the 12 Steps to help focus our practice of the 4 Standards.

This experimental method will contain 5 Steps and we will work with each of the 4 Standards as focused through each of the Steps. More specific instructions about the process will be provided when we begin. These 5 Steps are:

- 1. We list the ways we are suffering with specific life situations, feelings, behaviors, relationships, and/or states of mind.*
- 2. We examine how each situation relates to each of the 4 Standards and share our insights with a person or people we trust. (*1)*
- 3. We write a list of people that our suffering has harmed.*
- 4. We make direct amends and/or restitution to those we have harmed unless doing so would cause further harm.*
- 5. We repeat this process when/if needed and share it with anyone who expresses a desire to learn it.*

**1 – No one will ever be required to share anything with anyone. People can share in the group if they wish. Sharing with another individual instead is ok, and so is not sharing at all.*

Ancillary Practices

In both movements, there are ancillary practices that we will also use. They are:

Journaling

Story Sharing

Quiet Time, and/or Meditation, and/or Prayer

Volunteering for Service Positions

Rotating Leadership

Sponsorship and/or Collaborative Practicing

Fellowship

Reaching out to Others

Spiritual Reading

Use of Slogans

About Suggestions vs Commands, Absolutes, and Sharing

All these ideas for practice are just that, ideas. Some of us are new to them and some are old-timers. Some have worked with both practice styles, and some have only worked with one.

What is important here is to approach the whole endeavor with what some call a 'beginners' mind'. Try to drop expectations or preconceptions and see this as an experiment. If this isn't working for you there is no pressure for you to continue. You can simply stop attending.

Also, remember that this material is only a suggestion about how to engage in a process of self-discovery. There are no commands or absolutes here, no pressures, no must-dos, no demands for perfection. Furthermore, not everyone feels comfortable talking about personal things in front of groups. It is totally ok to come to the meetings and not share anything. It is even ok to attend the meetings and not work through the Step process. One can miss meetings and return later – perhaps much later. The point is that we should do our best to ensure that the meeting itself is not an additional source of suffering.

Just try to remember the Primary Purpose, 'to practice the shared desire to ease unnecessary suffering in our lives, and when possible, in the lives of others.'

The invitation is to join in if you wish and to participate at a level that makes sense to you.

