

Online AA Groups: Town Hall Meeting
Panel 2 - Problems and Solutions
Protecting my online AA group with Zoom safety procedures

David B and Mary T: Basic AA

Intro/importance of security

David:

Hi everyone, my name is David and I'm an alcoholic. Thank you to everyone who has helped make this Townhall meeting possible and thank you Tom for reaching out and allowing me to be of service. My homegroup is the Basic AA group (not related to Back to Basics) based in Tucson, AZ. We are a closed hybrid group that meets Mondays at 7pm PST. Our meeting information can be found on our website basicaatucson.com

We started as an in person meeting more than 10 years ago and like many groups transitioned to Zoom during the pandemic. I found this group as a still suffering alcoholic on November 9th, 2021 and due to the strength of the group and our principled group members, I have been a sober homegroup member ever since.

The importance of security and safety comes down to our primary purpose and Tradition 5 - Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Security ensures the safety of our members and allows us to more effectively carry the message that was carried to me. Online security takes work and requires the effort of each homegroup member. Mary and I will spend some time discussing various zoom features as well as how to set up a secure meeting on Zoom and we will walk you through the practices our group uses to ensure the safety of our group and its members.

Features Overview and Best Practices (Corresponds with presentation)

David:

Generally speaking, it is best to assign roles or elect homegroup members to specific tech positions. The size of your meeting will dictate how many people you need to monitor features like chat, mute, cameras, etc.

Chat - The chat is an extremely important feature that not only allows hosts and co-hosts to communicate during the meeting but also allows information to be seamlessly passed on to newcomers and those needing resources during the meeting itself. It is also an easy way for those in the meeting to compromise the security of the meeting. Turning the chat settings to "Hosts and Co-hosts" only allows necessary communication between hosts and attendees while preventing potentially harmful interactions between two members during the meeting. Having a "chat chair" or a group member or two

responsible for chat communications is advised and allows new members to understand who among the hosts they should reach out to for information and support.

Mute/unmute - In order to minimize distractions, noise, and potential outbursts or unsafe interactions, changing the mute setting to not allow participants to unmute themselves is advised. This allows the hosts/co-hosts to unmute participants when it is their turn to share as well as allows them to mute someone who is Zoom bombing or violating the safety of the group.

Cameras - Asking participants to turn on their cameras if possible is not only respectful to the speakers and other group members, but allows a level of face-to-face accountability. If someone is abusing their camera i.e. flashing or making rude gestures, a host or co-host should turn that participant's video off. Zoom bombings do occur and it is important to have a protocol in place to deal with them. I will turn it over to Mary to discuss these protocols and some helpful features.

Breakout rooms, Removing people from the meeting, and dealing with attendees causing problems

Mary: Hello - My name is Mary and I am an alcoholic. I am a homegroup member of the Basic AA hybrid group from Tucson, Arizona. Thank you to those responsible for today's townhall and for making all of today's presentations possible. Zoom has changed and modified since we first started using it as a virtual meeting platform at the beginning of the pandemic. You could say the explosion of virtual meetings drove many of the changes and many were based on security. No one wants to be in the middle of a meeting and have a group of zoom bombers run rampant through your meeting space disrupting everything, and it does still happen. Some of the important tools that we use are the use of breakout rooms, pushing people to the waiting room and locking the meeting down while we remove disruptive zoom bombers. This way more can't come in while you are working swiftly to remove those that are in the room.

Breakout rooms are something that both hosts and co-hosts have the ability to open and use. When you have someone in the meeting that might need some one on one assistance, whether it is for zoom pointers (which includes getting their audio and video working properly) or just a compassionate listener for a twelfth step conversation. Having a host/co host open a breakout room and assign a designated home group member and the struggling visitor is one of the best ways in which to handle and utilize the tools Zoom has for us.

Removing people from a meeting can be difficult but is a necessary last resort. If it is a zoom bomber you can put them out and report them to Zoom at the same time under the Security menu in the toolbar at the bottom. It is best to have someone from your homegroup who is your designated "Troll Patrol". Their only job is to keep an eye out for zoom bombers and if bombed respond swiftly to assist in their removal. They can also be the person who is assisting in working with people to get themselves renamed and watching for anything that might be a potential issue.

Pushing people to the waiting room is another way to separate someone from the meeting quickly without fully removing them. If you have someone who has come into the meeting and they have been repeatedly asked to rename themselves, turn on their camera, and they continue to take no action, push them to the waiting room. They are still able to change their name and you are still able to message them but it will be far less disruptive to the meeting if this happens to be someone who is a potential security issue.

Basic AA uses all of these techniques in running our hybrid meeting. I am going to pass it back to David so that he can give you a meeting security walk through.

Meeting security walk-through

David:

At Basic AA we open our Zoom meeting at least 30 minutes before the meeting to allow people to “get their seats” and fellowship. This also allows for time to assign roles related to the security of the meeting. As the host I will only co-host homegroup members and reach out to them in the chat asking them if they will be responsible for monitoring the chat, monitoring participants who may be Zoom bombers, and manage any potential issues that may arise. We employ a waiting room so when participants log on to our meeting, we can communicate with them prior to admitting them. We ask that participants change their name if they have a default name such as “Zoom User” or “Iphone 12” etc. We are a closed meeting so we confine our attendance to those who have a desire to stop drinking. We do our best to talk to new participants prior to the meeting or via the chat after the start of the meeting to get to know these participants and understand better what their problem may be. If they do not have a drinking problem, group members will offer resources for a fellowship that is suited to help that person or suggest various open meetings that they may attend. We change the chat and mute features to allow hosts and co-host more control over the safety of the meeting and have members paying attention to participants and making sure that the meeting itself is safe.

Again, we as a group arrived at our specific protocols through group conscious, implementation of traditions and AA guidelines, and the practical experience of group members. Decisions on meeting security and protocols always comes down to how can we best carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Resources/Links

<https://basicaatucson.com/>

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/p/product-support>

<https://aa-intergroup.org/about-aa/anonymity/>

<https://discourse.tiaa-forum.org/>

<https://naatw.org/>