

EDA History, Group Autonomy, and EDA Unity

Historically, as today, there are very few rules about EDA meetings: any two people with a desire to recover from an eating disorder may call their meeting an EDA meeting. Per Tradition 4, each group is autonomous except as affects other groups or EDA as a whole. This sounds very simple, yet questions regularly surface about what constitutes "affecting other groups." One such question is group composition.

Throughout its history, EDA has committed to removing barriers to inclusion. The General Service Board of EDA (GSB), however, has often been asked to list meetings that seemingly *created* such barriers. For example, in the early days of EDA, a group of anorexics wanted their own meetings, distinct from other EDA meetings. This seemed like a helpful idea - - wasn't it much better to have people with the same expression of an eating disorder meet together, where they could more easily identify with one another? "Double identification" can be a powerful tool in overcoming impediments to trust. The GSB appreciates that having peers with similar experiences in the same meetings can foster relationships of trust and reduce barriers to recovery.

Formally recognizing distinctions based on the expression of an eating disorder, however, suggests that people with different forms of an eating disorder are fundamentally different, when the GSB's internal surveys strongly indicated that most EDA members shifted in expression of their eating disorders over time, and that the EDA program worked well for all forms of eating disorder. Further, although some are uncomfortable admitting it, many if not most people with one form of eating disorder have gone through periods where they experienced other forms of an eating disorder. We concluded that reinforcing the idea of fundamental differences (and even, in some cases, a fear of "contagion") based on forms of an eating disorder was unhelpful and unsupportive of durable, resilient recovery. The GSB concluded that to permit such distinctions at the meeting level was akin to AA meetings differentiating one from another based on a preference for whiskey over wine: it isn't helpful at all.

Meetings that recognize distinctions based on symptoms would have created divisions within our fellowship that ultimately would have caused more harm than good. The GSB does not list meetings that differentiate on the basis of eating disorder diagnosis. Although the specific expressions of an eating disorder can be quite distinct, the root causes are far more the same than they are different.

In EDA, we are unified by a shared solution to a shared problem. EDA groups are effective in carrying the message of recovery to individual EDA members because we are united in our commitment to our common purpose, consistent in our use of the EDA Twelve-Step program of recovery and allied in adhering to our common Traditions. United we stand; divided we fall (Tradition 1).

Similarly, the GSB has determined not to support listing of meetings that differentiate based on our common solution. In EDA, reliance on something greater than ourselves to provide perspective so that we can achieve balance is an essential part of the solution to the problem of having an eating disorder. We think diversity in our positions on matters of faith (including the way of no faith) is one of the great strengths of our fellowship. Just as differentiating meetings on the specific manifestations of our problem creates disunity, so does differentiating meetings on the conceptions we have of God, Higher Power, or higher purpose. The GSB has declined to list atheists-only meetings as well as Christian-only meetings. While it is unquestionably helpful to have increased opportunity for double-identification, we cannot afford such opportunities if they come at the cost of undermining EDA unity (Tradition 1.)

In arriving at its decisions, the GSB considered whether recognizing *any* distinctions between meetings made sense. Apart from traditional format distinctions (i.e. "Step Meeting", "Topic Meeting", and "Speaker Meeting") aren't all distinguishing characteristics inherently disunifying?

The GSB determined to compare and contrast the costs of distinctions that could be disunifying and disempowering with the benefits of double identification that can empower people to build strong recoveries based on shared experiences.

The GSB considered the following examples:

- Some people are more vulnerable than others by virtue of their status as a minor. Having a meeting for "teens only" (with some level of supervision by parents or a school counselor) makes sense.
- A group decided it wanted to be listed as a Women's meeting. The GSB considered the implications. Would men be negatively affected by the presence of a Women's meeting? We consulted men in EDA; their answer was "no." The GSB then considered whether it would list a Men's meeting; would women be negatively affected? The answer from women in EDA was also "no." We can appreciate that there may be specific issues and pressures faced by each group.
- The GSB was approached about the idea of an LGBTQ meeting. Having a minority, protected, status seemed an important quality that merited consideration. Would the meeting be differentiating from other EDA meetings on either the problem or the solution? The answer was "no." Would other groups be adversely affected by the presence of an LGBTQ group? Again, the answer was also "no." Was there inherent value in supporting people to find others like themselves with whom they can relate? The answer was "yes."
- The GSB was asked to list a People of Color group. The GSB considered whether it is racist to recognize such distinctions. Seemingly, *any* distinction based on skin color could be deemed racist. The GSB considered that racism is more than just seeing that skin colors are different; it is ascribing specific, stereotypic values to skin color that support conditions of inequity. People recognize race much as we do attributes such as gender and age. Is it sexist or ageist to recognize such distinctions? We don't think so. Discrimination that entails negative consequences on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation are all prohibited by law in many places. These are protected categories. Vulnerable people, including minors, and people requiring accommodation are also specifically protected under the law. This does not mean we deny the rights of such people to associate with one another for their common support.

If a group of veterans, or a group of "people of a certain age" ask to list a meeting specifically for people in that category, it is probable that the GSB would list the meeting.

It is respectful to recognize that individuals who share demographics may benefit from double-identification.

Limits to Group Autonomy

Are there limits -- outside of not differentiating on the basis of the problem and the solution -- that the GSB recognizes in listing (and not listing) groups on the EDA website? Yes, there are.

- Groups that are reported as "problematic" by EDA members because they do not follow EDA Traditions are asked to hold a regular group conscience to consider how best to carry the EDA message of recovery, and to consider implications for other groups and EDA as a whole. If a group declines to hold group conscience meetings, and reports of issues continue, the GSB will delist the meeting.
- Pro-Ana and similar groups are not listed; EDA groups are recovery-focused.
- Groups that combine abstinence-based Twelve Step recovery with EDA recovery are not listed; EDA groups need to maintain singleness of purpose lest newcomers become confused.
- Groups that meet in treatment centers are listed when run by EDA members. Groups that are facilitated by treatment center personnel rather than run by EDA members are not listed.
- Groups that violate community standards recognized by the GSB are not listed. Therefore, any group that embraces an ideology that condones violence, or has an agenda that is not focused on EDA recovery is not listed.
- Meetings that endorse a specific plan of eating or program of exercise are not listed.

Perhaps all the above sounds very daunting!
Please do not be discouraged.

If you have a desire to create a special composition meeting that you think would benefit others in EDA in a way that existing meetings cannot, please rest assured: the GSB exists to help you and your group.

While it is in EDA's best interest to have as many EDA meetings as possible open to all who have a desire to recover, the GSB recognizes and respects that there is a place for special composition meetings and will do its best to support them.

Please write to info@eatingdisordersanonymous.org if you have questions.

Please contact wm@eatingdisordersanonymous.org to get a new meeting listed.

Special Composition Meetings in EDA



For more information please visit our
website at:

www.4EDA.org

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