

EDA History, Group Autonomy, and EDA Unity

In EDA, any two people with a desire to recover from an eating disorder may call themselves an EDA Group. Per Tradition 4, each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or EDA as a whole. Questions regularly arise about what constitutes "affecting other groups." One such question relates to group composition. EDA's General Service Board (GSB) *does* list meetings that differentiate from other meetings based on demographics (i.e., minors, LGBTQ, men, women, non-binary) because "dual identification" – where a person with an eating disorder also identifies as a member of another demographic group – can foster hope and recovery. The GSB *does not* list meetings that limit participation based on symptoms of the problem (i.e., type of eating disorder) or differences in the specifics of the solution (i.e., conception of God/Higher Power/higher purpose), because to do so would undermine EDA unity.

Throughout its history, EDA has committed to removing barriers to inclusion, yet the GSB has often been asked to list meetings that seemingly created such barriers. For example, in EDA's early days, several members with a specific type of eating disorder wanted their own meetings, distinct from other EDA meetings. This seemed like a helpful idea -- wasn't it better for people with the same expression of an eating disorder to meet where they could more easily identify with one another? We know "dual identification" can be a powerful tool in overcoming impediments to trust. The GSB appreciates that being in a meeting primarily with others who share similar experiences 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. While there can be differences, we find them less important than what we have in common.

The GSB's 2001 and 2019 internal surveys strongly indicate that most EDA members have experienced more than one expression of an eating disorder over the course of their lives. These surveys affirm that the EDA program works well for all forms of eating disorders. To do anything supportive of the idea that people with differing expressions of an eating disorder are inherently different is not helpful nor supportive of durable, resilient recovery. When we work on resolving the issues that underlie all forms of eating disorders, we need not be afraid of ourselves, of others, or of any form of eating disorder.

The GSB concluded that differentiating meetings by eating disorder type would cause far more harm than good. Therefore, the GSB does not list meetings based on eating disorder diagnosis. Although the specific expressions of an eating disorder can be quite distinct, the root causes and solutions are far more the same than they are different.

In EDA, we are unified by a shared solution to the shared problem of having an eating disorder. Our shared solution – working the Twelve Steps of EDA to achieve a transformation in perspective (how we see ourselves in relation to others and to our life's purpose) and action (how we use this perspective to guide us to create balance and joy) – sets us free.

Reliance on something greater than ourselves to provide perspective is an integral part of recovery from an eating disorder, yet our ideas about what works to provide perspective vary greatly. 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 classifying meetings by type of eating disorder creates disunity, so does differentiating meetings by our conceptions of God, Higher Power, or higher purpose. While it is unquestionably helpful to have increased opportunity for dual identification based on specific religious faith (or lack thereof) we cannot afford such opportunities if they come at the cost of undermining EDA unity (Tradition 1). A core principle in EDA is respect for the validity of our different perspectives. The GSB has therefore declined to list meetings that are focused on any specific type of faith or religious belief system.

The GSB considered the topic of dual identification for EDA members who are members of one or more additional Twelve Step fellowship(s). We want to be clear: EDA members support one another in working the Steps of EDA to gain perspective and balance, regardless of anyone's experiences in other fellowships. EDA groups respect the importance of other fellowships for some of our members and accept the need to focus on EDA solutions in EDA meetings. The GSB does not list meetings where the focus is on outside issues or any other fellowship (Traditions 5 and 6).

EDA groups are unified by our common purpose – to carry the message of full recovery to all who have a desire to recover from an eating disorder – and by commitment to the EDA Twelve Traditions to keep our groups safe.

One might think that recognizing *any* distinctions between meetings -- apart from format (i.e., "Step Meeting", "Topic Meeting", and "Speaker Meeting") – is disunifying. We think there is a balance to be struck. The GSB compared the impact of meeting distinctions that could be disunifying and disempowering with the benefit of dual identification that can create a foundation for strong recovery based on shared experiences.

The GSB considered the following examples:

- Minors (under 18 years of age) have protected status in the United States. A "teens only" meeting (with some level of supervision by parents or a school counselor) can help allay concerns about young people being exposed to adult content/predation.
- When a group wanted to be listed as a women's meeting, the GSB considered the implications. Men in EDA, when consulted if they would be negatively affected by the presence of a women's meeting, answered that they would not. Similarly, when a men's meeting got started, everyone consulted voiced their full support. We appreciate that members of some demographic groups face specific issues and pressures. The GSB affirmed that EDA as a whole was not affected by recognizing these meeting distinctions.
- The GSB was asked to list an LGBTQ meeting. Would the meeting differentiate 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 "no." Is there inherent value in supporting people to find others like themselves with whom they can relate? We affirm that there is.
- An EDA group asked to be listed as a People of Color meeting. The GSB considered whether it might be racist or exclusionary to recognize distinctions based on skin tone or ethnic background. The Board concluded that racism is more than just observing that skin tones and ethnicity vary; racism ascribes specific, stereotypic values to physical features and/or ethnicity that support conditions of inequity. EDA strongly supports members meeting with one another for mutual support and recognizes that dual identification can be helpful. The GSB considered whether it would list a meeting for a specific ethnicity and concluded it would do so if the ethnicity had a protected or minority status.

Limits to Group Autonomy and Special Composition Groups

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 its website? There are a few limits:

- EDA groups that have a purpose other than carrying a message of recovery from eating disorders are not listed on the GSB website.
- Pro-Ana meetings – where focus is placed on getting and staying thin – 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.
- EDA groups that utilize outside literature -- including non-abstinence-focused literature from other Twelve Step fellowships -- must be mindful of the importance of EDA unity in EDA meetings. To prevent confusion whenever outside literature is used, the group leader should announce at the start of every affected meeting that it was decided by group conscience vote to incorporate the identified outside literature.
- 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.
- EDA groups that are regularly reported as "problematic" by EDA members because they do not follow EDA Traditions may be removed from the GSB meeting listing if they do not follow a group conscience process to resolve concerns.
- Meetings that endorse a specific plan of eating, program of exercise, product, or outside organization 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.

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

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. Our policy is to list meetings whenever possible.

The GSB exists to serve EDA groups; it does not govern. In the event of a problem with a meeting, a member of the GSB will reach out to the group's email address or will attend the meeting to bring up the concern. The GSB representative will ask about familiarity with EDA Traditions, will suggest that the group regularly review them. The GSB member will also suggest regular group conscience meetings to resolve any issues that surface.

We hope all EDA meetings are welcoming and helpful to all who attend. Special composition meeting scripts usually announce specialization at the start of each meeting and include information about other resources available to those who may be looking for something else. The details of how to address situations that affect a group's identity (i.e., a woman attending a men's meeting) is left to the group conscience. We trust that each EDA group's primary purpose – to carry its message of recovery to others with eating disorders (Tradition 5) – will guide and inform the group's responses to predictable difficulties so these can be addressed with diplomacy and kindness.

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

September 2021