

Email Support Groups: a Guide

Welcome!

Welcome to LifeRing Online! Below are a few tips and pointers for navigating within any of our sobriety support email groups successfully. If after reading it you still have any additional questions or concerns, please contact Craig Whalley at cswhalley@lifering.org and he will be glad to assist you.

How Does It Work?

When you join a LifeRing email group, your email address is added to a list of all other members of that group. Joining a LifeRing email group doesn't require a membership in the underlying provider of the group (Yahoo or Google, currently), although using the email group's individual website, with its extra features, does. If a member has joined both the group and the provider, they can make use of the group's website to view all group messages (past and present), respond to messages, view group information (including some member information, photos, documents relating to the group, etc.) and change how they wish to receive group messages. To simply participate in receiving and sending emails, however, no provider membership is needed. Most members, at least initially, choose to receive all group messages via email and respond from their own email box.

When anyone in the group – including you – sends an email (or “posts”) to the group address, it will arrive in every member's “in box” under the sender's individual email address. When any group member, including you, wishes to reply to a post sent by another member, they simply click “Reply” to the email, and after typing their response and clicking “Send” the reply is sent to all the group members just as the original email was.

As different group members from all over the U.S. and the world respond to an original email, several emails arrive in one's inbox under the same subject line, and, in this way, posts back and forth become the basis of the email equivalent of a “conversation” or “discussion”. In this respect, the email group is much like a 24-hour-a-day online meeting.

Several different conversations can be carried on via posts sent under different subject lines at the same time. Members begin or respond to conversations (or not) at will. Some members post with frequency, some post sporadically, and some only “lurk” – they receive and read posts, but don't generally engage in conversations.

Group Confidentiality

Some new members find themselves understandably concerned with the confidentiality of their posts. While you do need to give at least a first name and an email address to join the group,

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please be assured that only members of the group can see posts by other members, either via e-mail or at the site (which you can only log into using a secure username and password).

Members are not required, for any reason, to reveal any potentially identifying information – last name (LSRMail being the only exception), physical location, address, phone number, occupation, etc. Some members create an email account separate from their regular email for the purpose of participating in the group. And all group members are required to have the same respect for others' privacy as they do for their own. Just as with 12-Step groups, what happens in the group needs to stay in the group.

As time goes on, and due to the extremely personal nature of the subject matter at hand, lots of members develop close bonds of friendship through posts with one another both on and off list (communicating amongst themselves via personal e-mails and/or phone contact) and generally begin to feel more comfortable revealing information about themselves at their own discretion.

Group Moderation

Many LifeRing email groups are moderated, meaning any group member or discussion that goes beyond the scope of acceptable behavior (see below) will be handled by the group moderator by either ending the discussion in question, placing an offending member on "moderated status" (meaning they can still post, but only after each message has been reviewed and approved), and/or removing members. Your safety and comfort are an important concern, and LifeRing's moderators take their role very seriously. So should you.

Some LifeRing groups are unmoderated, meaning that a convenor exists largely to add new members and to introduce them to the group. They may regularly participate in group discussions if they so choose to, but by and large they don't interrupt, step into, or otherwise in any way "police" them. Members are expected to moderate themselves, and do for the most part, while engaging freely in frank, open, and honest conversation with one another.

Where You Come In

The group convenor will welcome you to the group in an email to the list address (which you and every other member will see). You will most likely see some responses to this initial post, welcoming you to the group and inviting you to jump in whenever you wish.

Some people like to jump in and begin posting right away, and others like to lurk for a while before posting anything, waiting until they get a feel for the group. You are free to do whatever you feel most comfortable with. However, it's generally true that people who actively participate (i.e. read, originate, and respond to posts) on a regular basis tend to find more success in

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gaining and maintaining sobriety – the group’s reason for being – than do those more passively involved.

What Do I Say?

Say whatever feels right and true to you. Be honest. Talk about your history with your addiction, or why you think you have a problem. Talk about the things you’re afraid or ashamed to talk about but that you’ve been carrying around within yourself for too long. Unburden yourself of the reasons why you drink or use. Talk about why you want to stop. Talk about the obstacles that lie between you and stopping. Ask for help with those obstacles: other members who have been where you are and through many (if not all) of the same things you’re going through are always willing to share how they were able to get through them successfully. You’re not alone.

What Do I Do (Don’t Do)?

You are not required to be abstinent to begin posting – many, many members join the group while they are still drinking/using, but want to stop. However, posting while actually under the influence is strongly discouraged, and anyone who posts while obviously impaired on numerous occasions may be removed from the group.

LifeRing email groups offer secular recovery support, meaning that while members of any particular religious faith are welcome, one of the LifeRing’s basic guidelines is that one need neither believe nor not believe in God or a higher power to achieve and maintain sobriety. Therefore, agnostics and atheists are welcome along with believers. Members may discuss their faith (or lack thereof) in the context of recovery as they feel comfortable doing so, but, out of respect for your fellow group members, religious proselytizing or anti-religious diatribes are both strongly discouraged. Similarly, passions can be aroused by discussions of partisan politics and one’s views of AA. Be very careful and mindful of others when approaching these topics, or avoid them entirely.

LifeRing’s email groups are self-directed recovery meetings aimed at supporting member’s efforts to tailor their recovery based on what seems right to, and works for, them. Some members also participate in 12-Step groups and are free to discuss that participation while recognizing that no one is required to follow Steps, prayers, traditions or promises.

The groups strive to be safe places for members to be able to talk about their struggles with addiction while receiving encouragement coupled with firm support. Getting (and staying) sober is a journey, and one of the most difficult things a person can do. Sometimes it takes a while for us to get a firm grasp on sobriety, and sometimes more than one attempt is required.

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Harassment on the part of any member toward any other member is not tolerated.

Last, But Not Least

Finally, most members find that even though subject to the same limitations as any written communication, LifeRing's email support groups are such warm and open places that one begins to feel they are part of a special community of people who are joining them on their recovery journey, and are very glad they joined. We hope you find it to be so for you, too!