

AVP/USA, Inc. (AVP/USA) POLICY STATEMENT

Adopted January 16, 1994
Amended September 4, 1995
Amended September 8, 1998
Amended September 5, 1999
Amended May 30, 2010
Amended May 29, 2011

I. Purpose and Methods of AVP Program

The primary purpose of AVP groups is to offer individuals tools for personal empowerment, enabling them to live their lives with dignity and self-respect. AVP facilitators serve the community by leading workshops with the goal of enhancing individuals' skills for peaceful reduction of conflict.

Our method is experiential; we use a minimum of lecture. We believe that people have within themselves answers to their questions and problems. We encourage each other to search for solutions within ourselves, drawing on our own experiences and those of our communities. Workshops endeavor to break down barriers that prevent people from revealing their inner selves, thus enabling them to form friendships with other individuals, and to build a community.

II. Spiritual Basis of Program: AVP has a spiritual base. AVP promotes no religious doctrine.

We believe that there is a power available to everyone which, if we are open to it, can transform violent situations. We call this Transforming Power .

The goal is to empower individuals to liberate themselves and others from violence by finding creative ways to resolve or manage conflict peacefully by being open to Transforming Power.

We build upon each person's human worth, inner strength and spiritual endowment. We strive to maintain a caring attitude toward ourselves and others.

III. Quality of Workshops: Maintaining high standards for AVP workshops is a primary goal.

Another goal is that workshops conducted in different regions are similar enough that facilitators can easily be part of a team in different places.

General

- We follow the outline for standard AVP workshops as described in the Basic, Advanced and Training for Facilitators manuals.
- Facilitators need to be thoroughly familiar with the underlying principles of AVP, including the concept of Transforming Power, and endeavor to demonstrate those principles.
- All workshop participation is voluntary.
- A workshop leading to a certificate should be 18 - 22 program hours.

- Workshops are conducted using AVP ground rules as outlined in the Basic manual. Facilitators and local groups are encouraged to develop new exercises and resources and share these with the community of facilitators. Such exercises and resources shall not be published as AVP materials until they have been reviewed and approved by AVP/USA.

Content

- Basic workshops include exercises designed to build self-esteem, mutual respect and community, and to facilitate learning the skills of listening, cooperation, communication and problem solving. Role-plays demonstrate how these skills influence creative nonviolent conflict resolution.
- Advanced workshops expand the skills presented in the Basic workshop, while focusing on situations in our lives or in society that are caused by or result in violence. Themes may be decided upon by participants during the workshop or may be designated in advance.
- Although the agendas outlined in the manuals for each of the three levels can be fine-tuned to each workshop, elements of affirmation, communication, cooperation and conflict resolution are to be included in every workshop.
- The concept of Transforming Power is to be communicated in every workshop.

IV. Team Leadership

- Team leadership is basic to AVP workshops. Workshops require more than one facilitator. This does not apply to mini workshops or presentations that do not lead to a certificate, although it is still strongly encouraged.
- Prison workshops must have at least one outside facilitator.
- Every workshop must have at least one experienced facilitator, normally designated as a lead facilitator. It is recommended that this person will have, as a minimum, completed all three levels of workshops, apprenticed as a facilitator, and been recommended as a lead facilitator.
- For programs beginning in new areas, the apprenticeship process may be abbreviated with the approval of the sponsoring program to enable an individual to function as an acting lead facilitator pending designation as a lead facilitator.
- A workshop team leader may be designated to lead the pre-workshop team-building session, write the workshop report, and may have other responsibilities assigned by the local group. The workshop team leader empowers all team members, encourages them to take responsibility for team functioning and the quality of the workshop.
- For each prison workshop, an outside facilitator will be designated to act as liaison with the prison staff for that workshop.
- We encourage facilitators to work with facilitators at other training sites and/or invite facilitators from other groups to participate on local teams at least once a year. This cross-fertilization stimulates learning and growth among facilitators.

- Development and improvement as a facilitator are significant parts of the program. Local AVP groups will establish a process to enable facilitators to learn more about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, skills and growth, and the place of Transforming Power in their work and their lives.
- Prison facilitators are not paid for their work. AVP may reimburse any expenses incurred in conducting a workshop. Local groups may decide whether or not to pay facilitators a stipend for conducting community workshops. Local groups may also decide whether or not AVP paid staff may conduct workshops from time to time as part of their job.

V. Organization of Local Groups

Definition

- A Local Group, Local Chapter, or Area Council is a group providing AVP workshops in an area as defined by one or more of the following: geographical area, programmatic area or community served.
- It is recommended that as they are forming, new groups have a mentor to give support and guidance. A mentor may be obtained from a nearby local, or if none is available, from the regional organization or national AVP.
- Local groups unable to agree on the division of a geographic area will take the dispute to their Regional Organization or, in the absence of a functioning regional organization, to the Committee of Local and Regional Groups (CLARG).

Responsibilities

- The keystone of AVP operations is the Local Group. With a minimum of oversight, each Local Group makes decisions regarding managing its own resources and developing procedures that meet its needs as long as they are not in conflict with this Policy Statement or the Bylaws of AVP/USA, Inc. These decisions include, but are not limited to: finances; training and support of facilitators in their group; relationships with prisons served; pursuit of community applications of AVP; policies that govern facilitators, training procedures, workshop evaluations; job descriptions for organizational positions; and, oversight of any paid staff.
- Working within the policies outlined in this statement, Local Groups are responsible for maintaining standards for workshops including length of workshops, attendance required for certificates, adherence to ground rules, training required for facilitators, etc.
- All workshops are conducted under the authorization of an AVP Local Group. Facilitators must work with a Local Group when setting up and/or conducting AVP workshops leading to a certificate.
- Local Groups will provide oversight of outside facilitators working in prisons within their area, and ensure that they understand the importance of abiding by Department of Corrections regulations.

- Formal orientation of facilitators by the prison where they conduct workshops is highly recommended.
- Local Groups will report annually to their Regional Organization or, in the absence of a functioning regional organization, the Committee of Local and Regional Groups (CLARG) on their program.
- Local groups should appoint a contact person and notify their regional representative of the name of that person.

Governance

- Consensus is the recommended process for making decisions. A Local Group will endeavor to develop the community necessary to make this a viable way to govern itself.
- Local Groups shall appoint a representative to their regional organization.
- All Local Group meetings are open to active AVP facilitators and volunteers except when otherwise indicated. Individual groups may define 'active' for themselves.
- Local Groups may create their own organizational structure, deciding on officers and committees that will best meet their needs.
- Considerable effort, including holding AVP meetings inside prisons, should be made to bring inside prison AVP facilitators into the decision making process on policy matters. Local Group members could also meet with inside facilitators, discuss concerns and bring insiders' points of view to outside meetings without being obligated to uphold that position.

VI. Regional Organizations

Definition

A Region is made up of Local Groups within a state or contiguous group of states. Regional Organizations provide support to Local Groups and facilitate communications among their Local Groups and with other regions as well as with AVP/USA.

Responsibilities

- A Regional Organization supports its Local Groups by sharing information, exercises, camaraderie, and visions for the possibility of nonviolence. It may, with the agreement of Local Groups, negotiate with the prison system of the state(s) where it is located. It may organize retreats and/or conferences that provide opportunities for development of trained facilitators and reaffirmation of AVP's spiritual base. It encourages inter-visitation and AVP outreach to new areas. When asked, it may work with Local Groups within its area to help resolve disputes (see final section on Solutions When Problems Arise).
- Each Regional Organization appoints a representative and an alternate to the Committee of Local and Regional Groups. The representative acts as liaison between the CLARG and the Regional Organization and Local Groups.

- Each Regional Organization will report annually to AVP/USA on the activities of Local Groups within its Region.

Governance

- Consensus is the recommended process for making decisions. Regional Organizations will endeavor to develop the community necessary to make this a viable way to govern itself.
- Each Regional Organization will appoint a recorder for its proceedings.
- The Regional Organization will create governance structures that help it meet its responsibilities.

VII. Relationships with Corrections Department (DOC) and Facilities:

The goal of this relationship is to provide an environment where AVP programs can be conducted effectively within correctional facilities. Care should be taken not to compromise or surrender those aspects of AVP which are central to its success simply to win admission to a particular prison or prison system.

The following guidelines are expected:

- All participants in AVP workshops are volunteers.
- Participation is open to all inmates.
- Registration for AVP workshops is according to an inmate's sign-up date. A system needs to be devised to assure this happens.
- Participation in AVP workshops shall not be considered a requirement for any DOC program.
- Inmates have excused absences from their normal program assignments to attend AVP workshops. Inmates may not be called out except for mandatory call-outs.
- Participating facilities will support the full range of AVP workshops.
- Facilities will work with AVP to accommodate the required 18- 22 program hours in each workshop.
- Facilities are expected to provide appropriate space for the workshops.
- In order to preserve the confidentiality of participants, DOC staff is not present in the workshop rooms without prior approval of the group. Of course, this should not interfere with the correctional facility staff's ability to perform their essential duties.

The appropriate AVP body conveys these guidelines to the participating facility or DOC, and devises with that agency the method used to communicate the guidelines to the facilities. Employees of DOC are encouraged to participate in and facilitate community workshops, but may not do so in prison workshops.

Local Groups and Regional or statewide organizations should consider and implement ways of letting corrections staff know the philosophy and format of AVP workshops.

Local Groups will appoint an outside Prison Coordinator for each facility where they conduct workshops. Prison Coordinators are responsible for maintaining a good working relationship with local facilities and for dealing with problems as they arise.

Prison Coordinators, working with the Local Group, will ensure that outside facilitators are cognizant of prison regulations affecting volunteers and AVP workshops.

The content and process of AVP workshops remain within the province of AVP. Prison officials are not involved with AVP affairs.

VIII. Solutions When Problems Arise

For the purpose of maintaining our integrity and effectiveness, we must promptly use our principles and methods to resolve our own conflicts. To promote harmonious relations among people involved in AVP Local Groups, AVP communities should provide opportunities for community building.

To protect our community relations, AVP conflicts should be kept out of public view; e.g., not to be shared with client agencies unless the local AVP group or groups involved agree. Some suggested methods (described in the AVP Basic Manual for conflict resolution) are:

- Direct conversation
- Clearness committees (C-11)
- Threshing sessions (C-11), and
- Mediation.

In addition the Basic Manual lists a number of exercises to reduce conflict such as: When Things Go Wrong (c-11), Six-point Problem Solving (e-47), Queries on What it Means to be a Member of an AVP Team (c-15)

When parties involved are unable to find a solution among themselves, they shall invite members of Local, Regional and/or national AVP groups to assist in the solution. Persons unwilling to participate in conflict resolution until a conflict is resolved, shall be relieved of their AVP responsibilities until they engage or re-engage in conflict resolution. The relevant Local, Regional and/or national groups shall determine whether persons are actively engaged in the resolution process.