

Dealing with predators

The Central Region's 2001 Regional Forum took a bold step by holding a special session to discuss the issue of sexual, spiritual, and financial predators at AA meetings. Predators are AA members who take advantage of other members in various ways, such as:

- **sexual harassment**
- **sexual attack**
- **pressuring members to join a particular religious group**
- **borrowing money**
- **selling goods for personal gain**
- **offering investment schemes**
- **theft of group funds.**

While they aren't at all common, the damage they do can be enormous. The saddest thing about this type of activity is that it is often practised on vulnerable new members who are least able to use their judgement and defend themselves.

The discussion started with one member giving a heart-rending account of being raped by another member just after she had joined the fellowship. This quickly set the tone for the meeting: predation is an extremely important matter. It was agreed that the best way to handle the problem is to deal with it quickly at the group level. Several simple but effective methods are available.

- **Talk to other members about it and raise the matter at a group conscience meeting. Take care that you aren't just passing on rumours. Make sure you have well-established facts to work with.**
- **Discuss the problem with the person suspected of preying on other members. Listen to their side of the matter. Let them know the group disapproves of predatory behaviour.**
- **Make sure other members stay with the suspected predator whenever he or she is talking to vulnerable new members.**
- **Raise your concerns with any of the members you think may be at risk from the predator.**
- **Don't think the matter ends with your group. The predator may leave your group and move to fresh hunting grounds. You may need to warn members in other groups.**
- **Barring someone from meetings is an extreme step and should only be taken when other steps have failed.**
- **In certain situations you may need to notify the police.**
- **Under no circumstances should members resort to vigilante action and use violence to try to solve the problem. This would be totally against the spirit of the Fellowship and could turn the situation into a worse problem.**

It is clear that older members and office holders have a moral obligation to help protect vulnerable members. It's possible they may even have a legal obligation to do so. Certainly we need to do everything we can to ensure newcomers know an AA meeting is a safe environment.