

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS CAPE AREA ECHO

EDITION 6 - 2018

SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING SAFE MEETINGS - PART FOUR

Step Twelve - Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Speaking as the main/guest speaker at a group:

“The key to life is not accumulation. It’s contribution.”

Stephen R. Covey. The speaker can bring new life and hope to those still suffering from the effects of living with an alcoholic. If the speaker sees themselves as a gift worth giving to the group, and sees the others in that group as fellow travellers on the journey of recovery with them, it will enable that deep intimate sense of loving sharing and interchange to take place. Each of us has walked a different road through life and yet is unique, not only in our experiences, but in our character and personality shaped by those experiences. However, as travellers together on that journey we have much in common and so can offer and gain so much more from one another. Recovery enables us to travel on our spiritual journey towards wholeness as designed by God and to share our discoveries with our fellow members. *“To love what you do and feel that it matters – how could anything be more fun?”* **Katharine Graham**

Meetings need **structure**. This means having a meeting plan. The short version of Tradition 9 says “We don’t organise, but we do make some arrangements”. We

must try not to confuse structure with formality and rigidity. A meeting can be informal and flexible yet structured. Hence, we are encouraged to use the Al-Anon Suggested Meeting Format. A meeting demands a place that is quiet, private and protected from interruptions. Sharing should take place in a specific setting over a specific period of time for a specific purpose.



It is helpful if the **designated time** available for speaker sharing (usually about 20 minutes) and for the members to identify with the speaker in response (usually 2-5 minutes each) is specified in advance. It is desirable that the **topic of the share** the speaker is clearly defined as per the group’s agenda. This could include how a member has worked a Step, Tradition or Concept, their experience of a difficulty they had in working a particular Step or a topic chosen from the literature. If the speaker has carte blanche to choose their own topic then this can be made clear ahead of time.

Being mindful of **confidentiality** is key when sharing. Tradition Twelve - “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities” or the short version “Anonymity is our cloak of protection; it protects us – it does not hide us.” This is a

sacred obligation. The details of the share are **not to be relayed** to anyone who isn’t present at that meeting. This is our **safety**.

Anonymity and the law - The Al-Anon Service Manual 2018-2021 p. 41 includes a special note, “Anonymity is a spiritual principle and cannot be used as a legal basis to shield criminal behaviour, past or current. It is wise to remember that Al-Anon and Alateen meetings are not above the law. Members need to exercise care in sharing information that could require reporting to local, state, provincial or national authorities.”

Consequently, anonymity does not preclude a member from the law if they have committed a crime for which they have not been charged or acquitted. Members are cautioned against careless talk and sharing anything in relation to having committed a crime. The speaker must exercise caution in what they share in meetings, with a sponsor and extends as far as what is shared in a public forum such as a Convention or rally.

Telling our story - Remembering that “Al-Anon is a way of living, not just a way of living with an alcoholic” speakers share their story of **what it was like** growing up with or living with an alcoholic, **what happened** to bring them to find recovery in Al-Anon, and **what life is like now** having used the Al-Anon programme and tools in their lives.

Awareness 

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Awareness - "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes." **Carl Jung**. The speaker begins with a brief recounting of their experience in relation to their physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational life, which is common to the other members of the group. They speak only **for themselves and about themselves**, including their own unique varieties of **attitudes and feelings** in relation to that story. Emotions include both positive and negative feelings, namely joy, serenity, relief, hope, gratitude or fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, shame and grief. Sometimes this may mean relating some childhood, past or current experience of living with an alcoholic, which may have set them up for certain circumstances, **patterns of behaviour or relationships**. If speaking, it is wise not to dwell too heavily on early events, thus avoiding the tendency to share only a negative story without any hope.

Speakers share how their lives are now, and any discoveries of great significance about which they have become aware. This sharing may include descriptions of **situations and incidents, ideas and facts** but most importantly it should include the **particular meaning** these have for the person, together with their accompanying **emotional reactions**, their **memories** of the past and their **hopes** for the future. It should include such things as any recognised self defeating behaviours; acknowledging their 'pay offs', and the destructive consequences of those attitudes or actions. It can be helpful for others to hear about any struggles or stuckness

that the speaker encountered and how they dealt with it or overcame it. This is our **experience**.



Acceptance - Speakers are asked to share how they recognised their situation, how they **dealt with any denial** they may have had and how they came into the Al-Anon rooms. Dismantling denial can include **accepting responsibility** for the actions and attitudes which may have played a part in the family illness. An acknowledgement of behaviours such as compliance, caretaking, controlling and enabling can be outlined. Acknowledging the things we are powerless over and the things that cannot be changed can be enlightening for others. This is our **strength**.

Action - The speaker describes **how** they applied a Step or another Al-Anon tool to bring about change in their situation. This is one of the most vital, but often overlooked, aspects of sharing because it is important for listeners to grasp how the programme can be applied in a practical way. Being vulnerable and sharing struggles encourages others in their struggles and is an important tool to relieve shame and feelings of guilt and failure. Hope comes for others when the speaker shares the resultant **qualitative improvements** in their life, new positive feelings, behaviours, health, finances, and improvements in their

relationships and in life in general. They can also share any continuing difficulties they continue to encounter. And last, but not least, it is imperative to share their **dreams and visions** for the future. **This is our hope.**

Both "What lies behind us, and what lies before us, are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." ~ **Ralph Waldo Emerson**.

The Part 5 of the series will be Members' shares in response to the main/guest speaker.

LOVE YOU LONGTIMERS TEN QUESTIONS FOR AUNTY PATTY, 30-YEAR LONG-TIMER

1. What were your expectations of the programme when you attended your first meeting?

I came to the meeting expecting the members to tell me what I must do, how I should handle the alcoholic – how could I keep him sober?

2. What is your favourite slogan? And how has it helped you?

Think, Think, Think.

I never even gave the alcoholic a chance to say something. I would answer for him, then he would say that it wasn't what he was going to say.

Let Go and Let God.

- I would release him to God when he walked out the door so that I would not worry about what condition he would be in when he came back.

- He would say: "Don't borrow sorrow from tomorrow" – it would lead to depression and was not the meaning of the fellowship. If you expect it, you will get it.



3. What changes did you see in yourself and those closest to you once you found recovery?

- Accepting people, the way they are and not trying to change them. Being generous with my love, treating everyone the same way; not insulting people by rejecting them, even if a homeless person came up to hug me.
- Not interfering with or advising my children as it's none of my business – staying out of their affairs.
- Learning to say things in a different way – it's not what you say but how you say it (and you don't have to have the right answer).
- My Higher Power means a lot to me. But before recovery I would bargain with God; now when I pray I know that God is listening to me.

4. What were the most difficult things to accept once you found recovery?

- Trusting the alcoholic and believing that he would ever stay sober (so this links back to my favourite slogan – Let Go and Let God).
- Expressing love, from both sides, and having a forgiving heart – otherwise you can't appreciate the full programme or live the Al-Anon way.

5. Which is your favourite daily reader and why?

ODAT – it was the first reader that was available at the time and it remains my favourite.

6. What three things are critical for group health?

- Staying away from gossip.
- Rotating service positions.
- Group growth: what is being done by the group to keep newcomers coming back? In the early days, I was sad the group wasn't growing. And I just felt sorry because I knew what people

were going through. But I was told that you can't force the newcomer to come back; sometimes they expect a quick fix or solution to their problem.

- Newcomers: involve them in the topic that has been decided for the meeting but don't change the topic just to suit them.
- Language: run the meeting in both English and Afrikaans to draw in the Afrikaans people and because English can sometimes be seen as a class thing.

7. What role has service played in your recovery?

- I was Group Rep at Maitland for about 10 years (but I always sat at the back at Areas meetings). Service helped me to grow as a person and I got to know the programme. This programme made me humble – it's not just about me, but also about sharing my experience, strength and hope with the next person.

- I chair meetings, read my books and find speakers. If I see something that really needs attention in our group, I will follow it up in my books and then share it with them.



8. What does every newcomer need to know?

It doesn't matter what goes on when the alcoholic is drinking, be loving towards him. He needs to feel the love around him – don't swear or curse him; take him in your arms and hug him, kiss him and tell him you love him. Everyone around him is cursing him and saying you must leave him. So, you must fake it till you make it! I still remember a newcomer sharing how her

husband got such a shock when she did this!

9. What must every long-timer never forget?

- Where you came from (lest we forget).
- Have patience and communicate with the newcomer.

10. When do you plan on graduating (and are we invited)?

- There is no graduation from the programme: there is no such thing!
- I continue learning every day – there is something to learn at every meeting. This is the way I want to live now, with kindness and generosity.
- The alcoholic comes to AA for his drinking; the spouse comes to Al-Anon for her thinking.
- I would **never** be the person I am today without Al-Anon, so I will do anything for Al-Anon; I give because it makes me feel good.

~ Patty O., Maitland Group

TRADITION SEVEN

Tradition Seven – An Attitude of Gratitude

Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions

We are past the halfway mark of 2018. All around us we see escalating costs in basic goods on a regular basis. In Al-Anon we feel the same pinch, costs of monthly expenses continue to increase, we are not able to avoid this, and the knock-on effect is that this is seen by the contributions that members are able to make towards the fellowship on a regular basis. We are all trying to stretch our Rands to make them go just a little bit further.



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It is then that in these stressful economic times, we express gratitude for the generosity of all the members belonging to the fellowship, who willingly continue to contribute on a regular basis towards the wellbeing and the continuity of the Cape Area and beyond. It is only through this generosity of spirit that we can continue running an Area office, five days a week, making sure there is someone to answer that call from a newcomer or someone who may have reached their rock bottom and are reaching out for help.

Besides being able to run and operate the office, we should always keep in mind that the purpose of the fellowship is to help families and friends of alcoholics. It is only through the generosity of all members that we can continue to be available to all who may walk through the doors of Al-Anon.



These are a few excerpts from Courage to Change on gratitude:

“When I appreciate what I have instead of dwelling on what I lack, I feel good about my life. This allows me to be happy for another person’s abundance.” Page 170

“If the only prayer you said in your whole life was ‘thank you’ that would suffice.” Page 340

“I’m grateful for the Al-Anon program and all that my Higher Power has given me.” Page 366

And from Hope for Today on the Seventh Tradition, Page 332:

“When I contribute my part to keep my meetings self-supporting, I contribute to my own recovery.

‘To think of Tradition Seven as a protection for my spiritual growth is humbling and freeing.’”

~Fatima D. Finance Coordinator

MEMBER SERVICES

TRADITION 8

The traditions are guides for the conduct and unity of the groups. Tradition 8 reads:

Al-Anon Twelfth Step work should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

The pamphlet, **The Twelve Steps and Traditions**, offers the following explanation. It says that while there are many professions that relate to our needs, it is imperative that within the group we separate the concept of professional help from the help we receive from sharing our experiences from a purely personal point of view with others, who are there because of similar circumstances, i.e. being affected by the disease of alcoholism.

This “nonprofessional” process has given me a sense of familiarity with other Al-Anon members, that I have seldom experienced anywhere else in my life and it gives me a unspoken and almost pre-existing bond with members that is almost supernatural, in the sense that I struggle to be understood usually by everyone close to me. That includes my own children, my parents (until their dying day) and co-workers over the years. The feeling of acceptance and unconditional love I receive when I walk into the rooms is one of the most healing and comforting I

have ever experienced and it never fails to uplift and fill me with a renewed sense of hope and self-centeredness. And I mean that word in the most positive sense. Again, only someone from Al-Anon could understand how I mean that.



As the pamphlet states: “There is nothing quite like the friendship this can bring”. This healing that happens through the process of bringing together many who, despite incalculable differences, find a commonality in their battle with the disease of alcoholism and all that it brings with it, is something that Tradition 8 reminds us, should not be fiddled with, for in it lies its own power. The power of equality, where even if I am a therapist and you a doctor, we speak only of our own personal struggles and accord each other respect and attentive silence in hearing the other do the same. Here we can hear someone share with us wisdom acquired through the hard knocks of life and we may realize that all the books and knowledge in the world cannot replace that. Such is the non-professional nature of twelve step work. I have realized for myself that intellectualizing a problem might be fascinating, but possibly not very helpful to me. And I realize that while I love helping others, it is for myself that I am her

The pamphlet theorizes what might happen, if this aspect of the group were lost: “What if this were paid for? Much of the

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spontaneity, mutuality, and value to the helper would be lost. Truly in giving we receive”.



This line resonated with me and when I shared my deeper understanding of this line with my group, I found they were also deeply affected by these interpretations. Again, a real illustration of how this tradition operates and how powerful it is. Because I realized in a moment of clarity, that this adage is key to my own recovery in many ways. My own sense of lack and my defect of fear of being used has affected me deeply. I constantly struggle to determine whether I am giving too much or too little to others around me and even to myself. I can never quite get the balance right and I tend to over analyze every act or transaction of giving and receiving. I often feel beholden to others if they have given to me and vice versa, if I have given I will expect something in return. But here the idea of paying it forward gives us freedom in receiving and in giving to others in need. Similarly, the idea that opening your arms and heart for receiving is an act similar to that needed in giving. I know that I struggle to receive to let love in, a compliment or a gift of thanks is often a struggle for me and with my partner it affects my ability to be intimate. To really accept what others say as their truth about me. If, in giving we receive, maybe in

giving more we will learn to receive more easily. Or by learning to receive we can give more freely. I don't know. But I know the two are integrally related. And by giving, I mean giving of our real selves. The vulnerable part, the authentic part, that part that we tend to hide and protect.

The last part of the tradition-“but our service centers may employ special workers” reminds me that Al-Anon is an organization that requires my commitment. This means participation and donation, as I expect it to run and operate professionally. It's always easy to criticize when something is not functioning optimally, but do I ask myself: have I done my part in supporting the organization with my presence and financial support? In giving I receive. Once we look at these two unpretentious lines that constitute Tradition Eight more closely, we see how much we can learn and grow from its simple and profound wisdom.

~ **Natalie B. Member Services Coordinator**
bossi@telkomsa.net



HEARD IN A MEETING:

“Heard in a meeting/A nice way of saying ...”

“Stay in your circle with your Higher Power. If you get out of your circle and He decides to shine the light on you, you're not going to be there.” A nice way of saying mind your own business.

“Don't yuck on my yum.” A nice way of saying what works for me may not work for you and that's ok.

This is part of an article from the April 2018, The Forum Magazine



TO MYSELF AS A NEWCOMER

“Dear Mary,

This is going to be the best gift you could ever give yourself. You will come to love all of these strangers in a special way. You will learn you already have everything you need; it has just been covered up. You will change the way you think and will see yourself in the light of your Higher Power, not in the light of your fears. You will see that you are not what you were told. You are not stupid. You are enough. You will find your voice that you stuffed for so many years. You will find your feelings that have been frozen and will learn to cry and laugh. You will learn to understand the people in your life through the light of the Al-Anon program and will be able to love them and see their beauty and struggles. Yet, you will be able to take care of yourself. You will come to put yourself first, knowing that doing so is not being arrogant, but the right thing to do. You will find joy, peace, confidence and the ability to feel fully. You will love and be loved in a very special way.”

By Mary D., Florida

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