

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS

CAPE AREA ECHO

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SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING SAFE MEETINGS - PART TWO

"If we are together nothing is impossible. If we are divided all will fail" ~ Winston Churchill.

The three goals in creating a healthy group are:

- (1) confidentiality and anonymity,
- (2) resisting the temptation to give advice, and
- (3) acceptance of one another.

Confidentiality and Anonymity – Tradition Twelve: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities." The Al-Anon Service Manual refers to anonymity as a "sacred trust, basic to our fellowship and its survival" (p41). This is critical and the cornerstone of the success or failure of the whole group process and must be strongly stressed at every meeting. It is essential during meetings to assure the confidentiality of those present and what is shared at the meeting. We always remember: "What you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here."



Resisting the Temptation to Give Advice – This is important. People sometimes hesitate to share where they are in their lives for a variety of reasons:

- They are discovering it for the first time
- They are afraid of being judged
- They are afraid of being advised by those who neither know them well enough nor understand their experience and are therefore not equipped to offer appropriate advice
- They are being careful of their alcoholic's anonymity
- They may be learning to trust for the first time.

Most of the time the issues expressed reveal deep anguish or pain and need to be listened to without finding solutions or processing the issues through our 'morality-meter'. If people are to discover what is really going on inside, they have to know that their Higher Power will accept them whatever they discover. So, too, do they need to be confident that Al-Anon's members will have the same attitude. We seldom know enough about a person's circumstances to advise them immediately anyway.

Sometimes this open kind of sharing results in another member having some ideas for the person and launching into a speech or giving 'sermon-like' advice. To further understand the topic of crosstalk versus loving interchange, **Service Tool 6** in the Al-Anon 'blue folders' is a useful resource.

Invariably the member is not necessarily seeking advice; rather, they are risking vulnerability and sharing their true selves or experience, strength and hope with the group. The rest of the group can learn to resist commenting and refrain from advising or sharing their own similar experience which can serve to diminish the importance of the person's pain and story. The discipline of closing our mouths and opening our ears is a good practice at meetings. It's important to listen, not make comparisons or take the focus off someone else who is sharing a painful emotion. To allow a person to resolve their own 'stuff' is empowering in that it:

- Maintains dignity
- Develops confidence in their own ability to take charge of their lives
- Highlights that what is needed here is listening, understanding and support.



We can benefit from learning the value of silence. Pausing and thinking before we speak can be the beginning of healthier communications. Most people don't want unsolicited advice, criticism or opinion. We can support without having all the answers and let people demonstrate their own ability to solve their problems. That is why the sharing in groups should carry the Al-Anon message of hope and

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suggestion rather than by giving feedback or commenting on another's share. It is our responsibility to be compassionate, supportive and understanding of each other. Our valuable book *How Al-Anon Works* states that "In our home groups we share our experience, strength and hope with each other in order to recover from the effects of living with alcoholism. This sharing, listening, and being listened to is the 'loving interchange' referred to in our literature. How we do this is vital to our recovery process and to the health and growth of our groups and the fellowship as a whole. Al-Anon's slogan 'Listen and learn' reminds us that if we have the self-discipline to be quiet and pay attention to another's words, we can learn a lot about ourselves and our world."



Acceptance of One Another – Herein lies the power of the Al-Anon group. Listening attentively to one another with an open mind and an open heart gives a member a sense of value, self-worth and acceptance. As we listen to each person sharing, we listen for what is communicated without words, in the tone, the gesture and the body language, the feelings read in the eyes, face and hands. We see whether we can identify our own humanity and image of God in them. We try to identify with their story rather than compare. When we are not sharing, we concentrate our efforts on the sharing of others. There is a

wealth of discovery in the experience, strength and hope of other people: how things can be handled and perceived differently.

We may find it difficult to see things the way other people see them but these differences need to be respected and, in fact, treasured. This is the core of respecting one another as individuals, different from each other but equally important to our Higher Power. It often takes weeks, months, even years to appreciate that another person's perspective might be as valid as our own...even if we don't agree with it. It takes hard work and patience to try to appreciate the perspective of someone with whom we differ.

Growth in this area is truly growth in character. It has to do with thinking of ourselves with sober judgement and honouring one another above ourselves. Effective listening and observing opens the door to identifying another person's gifts we will otherwise never see.

Next month we will explore more skills on listening, sharing and speaking.

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless" ~ Mother Teresa.

Compiled by:
~ **Brenda A.**
Constantia Group



CONTINUUM TO INCIDENT REPORT:

Perhaps then this report
Has no end, goes on and on
Repeating its descriptions
Of challenges without end.

Perhaps there is no way out
Of constantly living the pain
Of loss and gain in love
Just take the steps again.

The biggest job of all
Is to be clear and simple
In delivering the message
That is my main downfall.

Clarity is not my middle name
I do not speak it nor do I know it
And often when I write it down
The sense is garbled too.

I wish I had a clearer brain
To work this through with but
I was born without such luck
The better option is my heart.

And therein confusion looms
Because I cannot be as cruel
In my heart as in my words
They tear wildly at each other.

My heart is soft and easily misled
It sabotages my cruel words
And stops me saying the truth
The reality of my stuckness.

Bleeding heart liberals
Cannot make distinctions
For their or others' good
They do not have the genes.

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Teaching old dogs new tricks
Now there's a thankless task
So why should it be different
With tough challenges like this?

And so, the circle turns
Nothing shifts, all stays the same
No one hears the truth
And no one moves an inch.

The pain goes on and on
The life remains on hold
The confusion carries on
The on is not turned off.

No one calls a halt
Nor dares to raise a hand
To make things different
No one grasps the nettle.

That way there's no sting
Because deep down avoiding
The pain feels better than facing
The failure we most fear.

And that is this: the failure
To be human, give respect
To do as you would be done by
To learn to detach with love.

I have no answers now
They may be on their way
More than that I cannot say
I suppose they call that hope.

Outro/Epilogue for AAA event:

And here's the epilogue
The last word if you will
Because I'm asked to connect
What I say to the theme.

And that's 'Free at last!' so
When I was asked to speak
I said as you have heard
That I hadn't got there yet.

I understand the goal
I really get the need
To find something to aim for
A bold and bright horizon.

All I can say to you
Is that I hope I find
A way ahead that works
For me: a little, in time.

I do not mean to put
The hope and strength in doubt
I really see the good
That Al-Anon gives out.

But for some of us the way
Is neither straight nor simple
The steps we try to take
Not always in a line.

But that's why the saying goes
Keep coming back to listen
Because in time something
Will lift your lost spirit.

I hope one day to find it
That simple soul solution
But in the meantime, know
I've made a resolution...

To move along a step
Or maybe even two
This year, with my group's help
I hope to see that through.

So, if you're new at this
Or full of rage and doubt
Then know that just to listen
Will help you work it out.



I'm very bad at listening
And even worse at reading
Which probably explains
Why my heart is always bleeding.

Yet while that blood is flowing
You can still find a way
To mitigate the mourning
Of that famous picket fence.

Grief also heals in steps
Though sometimes up and down
But time really is the best
For making smiles from frowns.

All I can say is this
If you're feeling grief
It may be time to let go
And really say your piece.

And that's so not my forte
As you will have heard
Just words and head and fear
It's really quite absurd.

But if you can get past it
That devil in your head
That stops you from detaching
And makes your mind like lead...



Then you might find some light
In looking at your feelings
For clear, honest insight
To pull you off the ceiling...

And put your feet back down
Where healing can take place
On solid, level ground
At your chosen pace.

But as you might agree
I'm slowly losing patience
So, I'm hoping that I'll see
Some kind of secret agent.

Come riding to the rescue
With buckets of serenity
Before I and others too
Completely lose their sanity.

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So, here's to 'free at last'
I hope it's a healing journey
And one that comes real fast
Without needing an attorney.

I really want to end here
I think you've heard enough
So, thanks so much for listening
I hope it wasn't tough...

...To hear the troubled ramblings
Of a novice Al-Anoner
Whose head is getting scrambled
And who just goes on and on.

Eggs have nothing on me
My mind gets fried each day
No wonder that I struggle
To take my cares away, so...

Free me from the guilt and shame
Free me from the pity party
Free me from the sadness game
And take me to serenity.

~ **Giles G.**
Courage to Change

TRADITION SEVEN

Tradition Seven – Caring and responsibility of self

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

What does it mean to be fully self-supporting? When I go shopping, I pick up an item I need and I pay for it. It should be the same with my recovery. I come into the rooms of Al-Anon and I get something I need. How do I "pay" for it? By contributing to the basket as it comes around at every meeting I attend; by offering to do service at my group, area and beyond. I share my experience, strength and hope with a newcomer or anyone else that may need to hear the message. It is only in starting with what I can do at that present moment that I

can start my journey of recovery, and in some small way give back to the fellowship what has been given to me.

I also need to understand that, for the doors of Al-Anon to remain open and these services to be available to the next generation, I need to do my part both in service and contributing to the bag in our Seventh Tradition. It all starts with me.

What is my recovery worth to me?

~ **Fatima D.**
Finance Coordinator

MEMBER SERVICES

Our new website is up and running! Please contact me should your meeting details change or need correction on the website, as this is an important way of letting people know about our meetings. We have no changes in the number of groups currently. Two groups have attempted to launch but have struggled to pull out of the starting blocks. It has made me realise how very difficult it is to start a group that keeps going. And therefore, to those of you who are members of very small but longstanding groups, I salute you for keeping the doors open. And, of course, it is up to all of us in the fellowship to support them and spread the word.

I am having challenges confronting the disparity between recognising a dire need – which all readily agree to – and discovering that filling that need does not mean you will achieve instant and rewarding success for your efforts. Our Alateen group launched in October last year to the general delight of all members. We found a venue suitable for teens – Christ Church

in Kenilworth – where other Twelve Step groups also meet. But we were unable to get a venue with concurrent AA and Al-Anon meetings, which many consider ideal for practicality and convenience. In the last five months we have had hardly any attendance, while our new AMIASes come every first and third Monday to open the venue and hold the space. We usually land up having a lovely talk with each other for about half-an-hour or so and then depart somewhat deflated to go our separate ways again. Maybe next time...

While we could just carry on like this indefinitely, it does not seem realistic or feasible. Much thought and discussion is going into marketing and **again** I urge every member to share this information with fellow members or people outside the fellowship who may need this service. Furthermore, any opportunity you may have to speak about it at an AA meeting would also help. In the meantime, we have contacted all the schools in the area. We may need to phone and go there physically to get any meaningful response and it has also been suggested that community schools need to be contacted as well. Much can still be done in this regard and we hope that, if everyone talks about it at least once, somewhere the ball will get rolling. We will continue for another month and take it one month at a time.

~ **Natalie B.**
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