

Experience, strength and hope from Al-Anon members for times when you can't get to an Al-Anon group

Dear Loners

July 2021

M is for... Mothering, Managing, Manipulating and Martyrdom.....The FOUR M'S

Before I came into Al-Anon, I knew about the 4 Ms. They were taking me downhill... **Mildness... Misery... Then Madness...** Then, if I wasn't careful... **Murder.** (Those are actually Bronwenon, not Al-Anon.)

We do have 4 Ms in Al-Anon. They're a bit different, but also not hugely helpful in our recovery. The 4 Ms I'm talking about are MOTHERING, MANAGING, MANIPULATING AND MARTYRDOM. Things we try and avoid in Al-Anon. They were ways I had been acting after I realised that murder would not be that helpful. I hadn't thought of them since my early days in Al-Anon, when I did them all the time, and found they didn't help. Why would I be thinking of them right now?

The FIRST M. MOTHERING. Because it was **Mother's Day** recently. And I started wondering about mothering. I thought about all the wonderful people who had mothered me in my life, and by that, I mean they had loved me like mothers, accepted me unconditionally, supported me without question and made me feel safe and cared for. That's what mothering is, isn't it? Well, there can be harmful mothering as well.

It turns out that there are many ways that 'mothers' behave, not all of them filled with love, tolerance, gentle guidance and total acceptance. Lots of us have been affected by the way our parents treated us. The 'helicopter mother' who hovers over her child, controlling everything it does. Bullying mothers, mothers who expect perfection, mothers we kids have to mother because they can't look after themselves. Mothers who use sulking and silence and hints and looks and other ways of controlling their children, and those who use outright physical punishment, sometimes violent. Some mothering can be very harmful indeed.

So should we be 'mothering' our adult alcoholic... either in a crazy destructive way, or even in the best sense of mothering, doing things for them, making things right, solving their problems? Or should we treat alcoholics as adults, **with their own needs and responsibilities and the right to make their own choices?** When I was always calling my husband 'baby', someone asked me why. They pointed out that he wasn't my baby, he was my **adult** husband. That was a wake-up call. I was actually treating him as a child. I made decisions for him, about him. Planning without his knowledge or consent. Dismissing his ideas and comments. Ignoring him as I went about managing 'adult stuff'. In Al-Anon I learned that I am not responsible for other people's behaviour. I am responsible for myself. I can grant others that same right.

THE SECOND M. MANAGING. Looking at the way I manage my life... and that of the alcoholic... I see it ranges from being self-righteous to admitting my faults. From being assertive (or even aggressive) to being submissive, from being domineering to obedient, from being disrespectful to obliging. All of these are ways **I am managing people, including the alcoholic.** These traits take me back, again, to my Fourth Step. All of these behaviours are worth examining. How do I 'get things done'? I can give direct orders when it's a staff member, and even if it's a child in the family, but do I give orders to my spouse? Does my spouse give orders to me? How do we manage each other? Who manages who? These are questions I never really asked myself. Over the years, I figured out that I didn't like taking orders from anyone, unless they paid me. But my relationship with the alcoholic? I saw I was also being managed by *him* in ways I hadn't noticed. My sponsor actually pointed it out. At home I lived with rules, decisions I had no say in. I saw I had lost my voice. Over the years I had given up all my independence once I walked in the front door. I was being managed.

In my turn, I was trying to manage someone who was drunk most of the time, not really listening or caring about anything except the bottle. So, my 'management' was bullying, screaming, shouting, ignoring, doing the job myself and feeling resentful. Managing an alcoholic effectively is a joke. But it led to the next question... should I be managing another adult human being? Shouldn't they be managing themselves? Should they be managing me? I figured out that MANAGING was not a suitable tool for a one-to-one, loving relationship with a partner.

In Al-Anon, we are not managed, the way a boss manages his staff, the way businesses are run. Lois W, our co-founder wrote, "Al-Anon [...] holds together by means of a loving understanding among its members. Al-Anon is united – without organisation, without **management**, without a chain of command or a set of rules – by its members' willingness to be obedient to the unenforceable. We do this by using the Twelve Traditions. These help us to live without **losing ourselves** or **forcing our ideas on others**." (*Paths to Recovery* [B-24], p133-134). Managing others is *less democratic* than learning to work together.

THE Third M. MANIPULATING. That's sort of underhand managing, isn't it? Yup, it's to 'control or influence a person or situation cleverly or unfairly. To sway someone to act or feel in a certain way.' When doing my Fourth Step it could come up on the scale of 'Honesty/dishonesty'. Women without power often use this when nothing else works. My mom did it. I learned it from her. Put on a sweet smile, use people's needs and weaknesses to get your own way. Charm. Sweet talk. Guile. That's manipulation. I use it when my simple honest requests and needs are ignored. Thing is, do I have to? Is there a better way? On p134 in "*Courage to Change*" [B-16] it says "*Manipulation had been a normal part of my life for so long that I forgot how to have a discussion or make a straightforward request. If I wanted someone to do the dishes, I tried to make them feel guilty by telling them how much I had done for them, or I complained that they never did their part. It never occurred to me that I could simply and politely ask for what I wanted, or that I could accept my request being turned down! But I'm learning. A day at a time I'm learning.*"

The last of the Four M's... MARTYRDOM. Oh, my goodness! That sounds positively medieval! Do we still have martyrs today? Again, yup. Luckily, we don't **have** to be martyrs anymore! Al-Anon tools show me how to be kinder to others, and not feel like a self-righteous victim anymore. I learned to stop feeling sorry for myself and practiced the new skills I learn in Al-Anon meetings. How to talk, how to listen, how to not get into arguments.

You know this phrase: '**What you think of me is none of my business**'. Your words are a reflection of you, not of me. That's YOUR view of the world. I can let go of others' opinions, suggestions, orders, demands, and evaluations of me. I just thank them for sharing their view with me. And I can let it go. "Thanks for that interpretation!" "Oh, now I understand that's what you're thinking! What an interesting view!" **I don't ever have to take other people's views as my own.**

I have found with my husband, who follows some groups on Facebook that I don't, that he comes up with views that don't match mine. For YEARS I argued about these views. I have tried to change them, feeling like a **martyr**, trying to **manage** his views, **manipulating** his thinking. I have tried to explain my viewpoint in a **motherly** way, as to a child. It always leads to a fight. When I remember, I switch to saying, "Hmm. Interesting viewpoint." These days, I argue with people who enjoy it... my son Don. We argue every week. It's great fun. It drives the rest of the family bananas. Whether you like to argue or not, **we are all entitled to our own view.**

I'm not a **martyr** with other people's behaviours as well. I don't drive with my husband on long trips because of his road rage. That's my boundary. Boundaries replace the 4 Ms for me. As it says in "*Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships*" [B-33], 'Boundaries are for our own safety and protection and are our responsibility. Expecting our wants and needs to override anyone else's is not setting boundaries but **an effort to control or manipulate others**.' (p 68). This book has the best guide on learning to set boundaries. **When I learned to set boundaries, I didn't have to manipulate anyone anymore.** You see, I used manipulation in the past to protect myself, when I was too scared to say no.

So, the 4 Ms. I still use them now and then. I fall into those habits so easily. But I can smile now and set boundaries, I can be easy and relaxed about it. I don't mind if people don't like it. I'm not trying to change people. I can't. People can change themselves. In the meantime, I do what works. You all know what works. That's why you're **here**. Bless you all and thanks for letting me share.

Thank you Bronwen. I like to think of a fifth MMaturity. After years in the fellowship, I like to think that I have developed some maturity to help me cope in difficult situations.

The loner committee welcomes all share for consideration in our newsletter. Please send to the office.

If you would like to attend an online meeting, please go to our websites www.alanongauteng.co.za or www.alanon.org.za to find contact details for online meetings. Tradition Seven: Every group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions. Although we are under lockdown our office expenses still need to be paid. If you are able to help our bank details are below.

Stay Safe, Juliet

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