

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

Dear Loners

September 2021

Thank you for submitting this extract from a newcomers meeting. Newcomers are always welcome to attend our meetings, even if it is just for a look and see.

From *Courage to Change* [B-16] page 291 "As a newcomer, many of us were surprised by the absence of rules in Al-Anon. Before we found recovery from the effects of alcoholism, a strict sense of order may have been our only way of feeling some control. Naturally we expected a program as successful as Al-Anon to be even more rigid than we were! ...Instead as a newcomer I was told that I was free to work the steps at my own pace...."

My thinking was so distorted by living with the ongoing chaos, and my hypervigilance and a high need for control were some of the results. Coming to accept that I was powerless seemed like accepting that I was helpless, and that felt like giving up completely. It took time for me to learn from long-time members that the only thing I had control over was myself, and that this is true power, not the illusion of power that controlling others seemed to offer. Now I often remind myself to be patient with the newcomer who clings to the way they have coped with a chaotic family situation for a few, or many, years. There may be lots of questions, and the group's flexibility may be tested by a talkative newcomer who needs a lot of time and space to vent their frustration and anger.

As a newcomer, I began to settle into the group, and I gradually became willing to listen to the wisdom of the steps and the experiences of long-time members. This took me about 6 weeks, and as I began to become familiar with the language and the conventions of the meetings, I started to unclench my inner numbness, anger, resentment, and grief. The most powerful thing anyone said to me at my first meeting was "give us six meetings. Please attend 6 Al-Anon meetings, then decide if the programme is for you". I've heard that amended to "give us 3 months, then decide if the programme is for you" which I think is more realistic.

All newcomers doubt that they belong in Al-Anon, but as we know, "if the medicine works, you probably have the disease". We learn that everyone is welcome in Al-Anon: all demographics, races, ethnicities, ages, professions, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, levels of education and income groups are affected by the common scourge of alcoholism, and no person has more or less of a right to belong here. Our judgement is clouded by denial (Oh, I don't think it's that bad!) and it may feel extremely uncomfortable to tear our obsessive thoughts away from the alcoholic and to focus on ourselves, and our part in the craziness that is the alcoholic family. Giving up on the "3 Ms" – mothering, managing, and manipulating can be hard. Group members can practise patience, tolerance, and good listening skills to allow the newcomer to find their place in the Al-Anon group. Sometimes the same story needs to be told many times before it changes to a more positive version of what we've lived through.

This development of trust and connection to the group is easiest in a face-to-face meeting, and more difficult in online meetings, where we receive limited input about the people in the meeting. We may be able to see head and shoulders of other members, or not even that, if we are attending via a smart phone. Paying attention to greeting the newcomer warmly with a smile and kind words, acknowledging their courage in attending for the first time, and staying on afterwards to answer any burning questions they may have become even more

important when they are in a virtual meeting for the first time. What works in favour of our group meetings being online is people being at home much more during lockdown and having time to attend meeting with fewer work and travel commitments. The downside is often a lack of privacy in the home, and problems with sharing when that is the case.

The good news is no-one gives us an entry assessment. Only we decide if we belong. We decide if we want to work the steps and the other legacies, and we decide if we want to find a sponsor, to take on service roles and kick-start our personal growth. We may lurk in groups for a while, developing trust in our fellow members and the organisation itself, which is a huge step for those of us who grew up in dysfunctional families, with untrustworthy adults and many secrets. Eventually, if we stick around long enough, we realise that we belong, and that Al-Anon is the right place, the safe place to be. And it dawns on us that the Al-Anon programme as a basis for living, that nourishes the mind and the soul, and our true journey of recovery has begun.

We have a regular online Newcomers meeting every Sunday at 17:00. Everyone is welcome. For online settings please contact our office.

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](http://www.alanongauteng.co.za) or [www.alanon.org.za](http://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

ABSA Bank, Oakdene, branch code 632 005). Current account no 1118881482.....in the name of <b>Al-Anon Information Service</b> . Please put your <b>name or group as a reference</b> .
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