

CROSSTALK & LOVING INTERCHANGE

Creating and maintaining healthy groups in Al-Anon is key to the survival of our fellowship and to the growth of each member.

There are many factors which contribute to having healthy groups; one of the main ones being how we conduct the loving interchange during our meetings. Crosstalk is a term which has arisen in connection with certain behaviours considered to interfere with people feeling safe to share freely and openly and has caused a lot of discussion amongst Al-Anon members.

In 2004, the following two questions about crosstalk were raised and answered on page 60 of the Conference Summary in the 'Ask-It-Basket' feature:-

14. Q. How do we define "crosstalk"? How can we deal with "crosstalk" without becoming rigid or controlling? Does the WSO have an official stand on crosstalk?

A. It is within the autonomy of the group to define crosstalk. The World Service Office has no official stand on this practice. Reviewing the group's definition during the group's periodic inventory will help the group members maintain flexibility.

15. Q. What is the difference between loving interchange and "crosstalk"?

A. A group, at its business or inventory meeting, could determine its own group conscience as to the amount of interchange appropriate for the meeting. The size of the group, the length of the meeting, and the group's desire to hear from everyone in attendance are all factors for the group to consider. Reading and study of the "Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon", in Alcoholism, the Family Disease (P-4), and The Twelve Steps and Traditions (P-17) may help.

It seems that the term crosstalk has been a controversial one for many years and although there is no reference to that term as such in our books, there are several articles on it in the WSO publications Inside Al-Anon and the Forum (CAL).

The Dec/Jan 1988-89 Volume 12, No 1 issue, of Inside Al-Anon talks of members letters expressing concerns about the effect of crosstalk at group meetings and from these letters and conversations they state that: - "Cross-talking has been defined as talking out of turn, advice giving, questioning the person who is sharing, holding private conversations, having an individual comment on everyone's sharing, and as being discourteous and intimidating."

A follow-on article in the Aug/Sept 1989 Volume 12 No 5 issue they summed up the opinions given in the letters as follows:-

"In general, there was unanimity in everyone's commitment to Al-Anon principles even though there was disagreement about the term crosstalk. It could be that the problem lies in the word itself, which has its origins in the world of psychotherapy rather than in Al-Anon literature and tradition. Perhaps Al-Anon members would be better able to focus on Al-Anon principles by avoiding the use of the term crosstalk, which inserts its own divisive 'personality' in a place where it appears that everyone who wrote would prefer unity around our common purposes and principles."

What then constitutes a healthy meeting, safe sharing and loving interchange?

Meetings are meant to be a safe haven for recovery, a place where acceptance, understanding and love from members with common problems can be found. One of the most helpful aspects of Al-Anon group meetings is the opportunity to voice our dilemmas, confident that we won't be condemned for speaking frankly. We hear the solutions while listening to other people sharing. Members have a right to express themselves, they are trying to recover by being honest about their feelings, admitting doubts and trying to handle their disappointments. If we are able to share openly, without fear of being interrupted or judged, we feel safe, and we can grow.

Consider why some groups flourish and grow, while others, with equally dedicated members, stand still or even fall apart. Most often it depends on how well the members of the group understand and apply the Twelve Traditions. Personal progress depends on the harmonious working together of all group members; working together requires a willingness to listen to the ideas of others with an open mind, sharing our views with them, accepting what the group's majority has agreed on, and not insisting that our views be accepted.

Every member has a responsibility for shaping the group, creating that atmosphere of love and total safety. In doing so, we owe one another courtesy and respect for our differences of opinion. Being open-minded means being flexible and sharing through loving interchange of ideas and opinions. Joining hands at the end of each meeting gives a sense of reliance on each other rather than dependence on our own willpower.

"I believe that keeping myself informed, becoming familiar with Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature, studying the Al-Anon Steps, Traditions, and Concepts, using the principles of tolerance and courtesy in my conversations and keeping an open mind will help me stay in balance and keep those I come in contact with informed about the Al-Anon Family Group's spiritual quest." Ric P Manitoba.

Members share on crosstalk & loving interchange from CAL - The Forum

- I have attended meetings in two different states, one without crosstalk and one with crosstalk. I had been trained professionally to give feedback when someone speaks. When I was new to Al-Anon more than 20 years ago, it was difficult for me to sit quietly and listen to what others were saying without commenting. It was in this meeting, without crosstalk, that I was able to grow in the program.

Patience was one of the important tools I learned by listening and only sharing my experience, strength, and hope. When I sit quietly listening to the member sharing, this allows him/her to clarify or change his/her thoughts without interruptions. How many times have I spoken before allowing this other person to finish what they have said? How many times have I interrupted the thoughts of that other member?

Embracing the silence is actually an effective and empowering part of the listening process. When I sit quietly, I am showing respect to the other member, I am telling the member he/she has something of value to share and this empowers the member to find solutions without offending him/her with advice, comments, and solutions.

My new home group does crosstalk. This has been difficult for me and I have expressed my opinion when I chaired a meeting using the article on crosstalk.

The '*good of the whole*' is that they support the use of crosstalk. I embrace the silence of allowing each member to share without interruptions. Even though I cannot change what others want to do, I can 'Let It Begin with Me' and do what is comfortable for me.

Pam, Nebraska

- To me, crosstalk would defeat Al-Anon's principles and guidelines. Listening shows respect. When you speak, I can listen without others talking over and around the subject you are bringing to us.

When I came to Al-Anon I didn't have much respect for myself or others. Al-Anon's whole format has taught me to listen, learn, and show respect to the person speaking.

Elaine, British Columbia

- Concerning crosstalk, what happened to 'share my experience, strength, and hope' for the newcomers and all others at Al-Anon meetings? Not everyone has had the exact same experience or acted in the same way, but most have been helped by the sharing and caring of others at meetings of how they dealt with the problem. Maybe it was just a slogan or two like 'Let Go and Let God' or 'Keep an Open Mind'. That's how 'Keep Coming Back' has helped create many of our longtimers in the program.

Suggestions of Al-Anon literature that may help with a specific problem like references for readings indexed in the back of *One Day at a Time* (B-6) and the *Courage to Change* (B-16) and other literature can be helpful. Newcomers don't know where to find answers without some sharing by longtimers. Sometimes someone's problem makes a good topic for a meeting.

Sandy C

- As a newcomer, I felt that the crosstalk in meetings saved my life. My thinking was so distorted that I needed that type of loving interchange at the meetings I attended.

If I asked for advice about my situation in meetings they would always suggest I pray about it. They gently confronted me by using 'I' statements and asking me probing questions. By doing so, they shared the experience, strength, and hope of their recovery.

Perhaps crosstalk is getting a bad rap in meetings because there are some members who will comment on another's sharing without using those important 'I' statements and they don't relate their sharing to their own recovery.

Sue, Alabama

References for further reading: -

Al-Anon's Twelve Steps and Traditions P 85-88

How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics - Chapter 13 Communication.

Speaking of Crosstalk Inside Al-Anon - Aug/Sept 1989 Volume 12 No 5

Al-Anon BC Before Crosstalk - The Forum 2004

Crosstalk – or Loving Interchange - The Forum September 26 2007

Crosstalk – or Loving Interchange Responses - The Forum December 19 2007