



Playing Well with Others – Being Better in Relationships

Session 2 - Tug-O-War Using Good Communication Skills

Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships – pg. 50

Gaining the courage to speak openly and honestly about ourselves is only half of what makes good communication. The other half is learning how to listen. The fear of judgment and shame that kept so many of us from sharing our authentic selves also kept us on our guard, readying our defenses for the inevitable attack. If we are busy thinking about what we are going to say next, we are not listening. Al-Anon meetings were perhaps the first place we learned what it meant to really listen. By practicing in meetings, we became able to let our thoughts rest while someone else was talking, so we can really hear what they were saying.....

But what happens when the people in our lives –alcoholics or otherwise are unwilling or unable to communicate clearly with us? What then? No matter how much we may wish to, we cannot control whether or not another person is able to share honestly with us or listen to us. Communication is a two-way street, but we are only responsible for our side. If we are unable to have a face-to-face conversation, perhaps we could express our feelings some other way. Writing a letter or sending an email or text message may be a more effective method of speaking our piece while letting go of the results.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the people in our lives will respond positively to our efforts. Sharing our thoughts with a sponsor or other trusted friend can also provide some relief. Whether or not it is reciprocated, doing our part to communicate clearly can give us a clearer understanding of ourselves and our needs. This, in turn, will give us a firmer foundation upon which to build our relationships –with others as well as ourselves.

How Al-Anon Works pg. 96

Honesty is a great gift to give to any relationship, but diplomacy and consideration for the feelings of others and the appropriateness of the situation are also important. Many of us benefit from learning the value of silence. This is especially true of those of us prone to dispensing unwanted advice or criticism. Since we can't truly know what is best for other people, our opinion about what they should or shouldn't do is likely to do more harm than good. If asked, we can share our own experiences without insisting on appearing to have all the answers. We can communicate our faith in the ability of other people to solve their own problems rather than trying to do it for them. We can learn that sometimes it is best to keep our mouths shut.

How Al-Anon Works pg. 98

But not all of our communication is determined by what we do or do not say. It also depends upon how we say it. Not only our choice of words, but also our attitudes, facial expressions, and tone of voice can either open a channel or slam a door, regardless of the subject being discussed. All people, from the cashier at the drug store to our children, deserve our courtesy. Any message can be conveyed with courtesy, even one of outrage. If we treat people well when we speak what is in our minds and hearts, they are much more likely to hear what we have to say.

This takes courage. It is much easier to let our words convey compliance while our tone of voice expresses contempt. This is a way of communicating anger without taking responsibility for it. Instead, we have the option to say exactly how we feel with as much respect as we can muster. We are apt to get better results this way, but even if we don't, we will know that we have behaved with integrity. As we become the kind of people we can admire, we learn more appropriate ways to express our thoughts and feelings.



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Session 2 – Twister Feelings, Trust



Hope for Today – pg. 331

One thing is certain about my childhood. I learned first-hand the instability and chaos that rules a drinking home. I learned to trust no one, to stay silent at all costs, to stuff my feelings, never to stand up for myself, to take on more responsibility than I could handle, to love conditionally, and to tell white lies to cover up my hoe life. No wonder as an adult perceived that close interpersonal relationships were like constantly moving targets. Usually I was the one who was moving because I lacked the skills to develop and maintain healthy adult relationships.

Thanks to Al-Ann I have learned that it's safe to trust again. First, I began to trust my Higher Power who loves me unconditionally—no matter what I say, do, or feel. I learn to trust the fellowship where many have experienced the same childhood traumas that I did. I'm also learning to trust the people in my life—my husband, friends, siblings, and even my parents. In spite of my unhealthy childhood, I forgive both of my parents.

Although, it took me four decades to recognize my disease and find my way to Al-Anon, I have been strengthened and blessed by the miracles that have taken place in my life through this program. I owe this fellowship and God a huge debt of gratitude and love.

In All Our Affairs – pgs. 68-69, 71

As the family disease of alcoholism progressed, I learned to bury feelings of inadequacy, confusion, and hurt. As one consequence, I developed physical illnesses, beginning with migraines.... After coming to Al-Anon, seeking professional help, and reading everything I could get my hands on concerning alcoholism, I began to let some of the feelings come up. I saw that I was so angry I needed to show everyone how tough-minded I was—that I would let no one walk on me. Fear was what I really felt, but I had showed the world how tough I was so many times that I hear my echo and believed it..... Al-Anon has helped me take some risks. With the help of the Steps, I am looking more honestly at my feelings and accepting what I see. It helps me to share what I discover with my Al-Anon support system, but I am not obligated to justify myself to anyone; it is really between God and me.

I am learning to treat myself as if I'm valuable. I find that when I practice long enough, I begin to believe it.

Opening our Hearts Transforming our Losses - pg. 117

Identifying our feelings does not come easily for everyone... Awareness of painful feelings can leave us anxious or afraid. Our fear of grieving can be so powerful at times it might seem safer to stuff our feelings than to feel them.... Avoiding or minimizing our feelings can eventually become an automatic response – almost like a reflex....We may have thought we were keeping our feelings at bay, but the more we resisted them, the more power they gained over us.

As with new behavior, we might struggle at first with finding a balance between minimizing our feelings and focusing too much on them. If we've spent the majority of our lives closed off from our feelings, we might tend to go to extremes at first..... When we're feeling overwhelmed, we can take a moment to slow down our thoughts and bring ourselves back to the present. If we start to panic, we can remind ourselves that in this moment we are safe, even if what we are feeling may scare us.

The more time we spend around recovering people who take the risk to be open and honest about their feelings, the safer we feel about express our own. In time we come to understand that whatever we are feeling is worthy of our attention. We don't have to suffer in silence with our grief..... In Al-Anon we learn to value all our feelings, even the ones that make us uncomfortable. Our Steps give us the tools to recognize and share our feelings, to love and nurture ourselves, and to trust that whatever we are feeling will eventually pass.

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Choices

Session 2 – Rock Paper Scissors Using “Choices” in Relationships



Choices

Discovering Choices – pg. 76

How we react to our feelings is ultimately a choice. Almost everyone has had some discouragement or disappointment in relationships with other people; that’s not a reason to conclude that there is no hope for something better. We have the opportunity to make amends when we’ve made an error and the freedom to learn a positive lesson from a negative situation.

The recognition that we have choices opens the door to hope--- hope that despite the effects of alcoholism on our lives, we can find a more positive way of relating to other people. Once we realize that we are not permanently blocked by these negative effects, we can admit that there is a range of other possibilities. Even if we don’t yet know what these positive possibilities could mean for us, we can begin to open our eyes to the many resources in Al-Anon available to help us broaden our vision.

If we choose, we can find ways to fill our moments with comfort, joy and serenity..... We can find a different way to look at ourselves and others, leaving behind fears that once seemed insurmountable....It may take time to focus our efforts and attention on what we can change instead of what we can’t.... We can learn to open our hearts and be still. Growth often occurs in the quiet space between what has been and what is yet to come.

Discovering Choices – pg. 95

Al-Anon works for us through a system of substitutions. We are encouraged to replace each painful thought with a more positive alternative. Hope replaces disappointment. Confidence replaces fear. Stubborn pride gives way to acceptance. Focus on ourselves replaces frustration with someone else. We can learn to take care of ourselves, and in the process we learn how to build better relationships with others.

Courage to Change – pg. 302

It’s amazing how my attitude towards others tends to return to me like a basketball rebounding off a backboard. My impatience with other people often generates even more impatience with myself and my world. When I am unkind to someone, I get defensive and expect others to be unkind to me. Likewise, when I accept someone unconditionally, I find that my whole world feels safer.

So it’s in my best interest to treat others as I wish to be treated. I try to imagine that my words and actions are being addressed to myself, because in the long run I generally get back what I receive. If I am unhappy with what I receive, I might try looking back for that same behavior in myself. It may not take exactly the same form, but I find that whatever I dislike in another is something that I dislike in myself. The reverse is also true: What I admire in others probably reflect as admirable quality in myself.

There is something for me to learn from every interaction I have with other people. I will make an extra effort today to take note of the attitudes I’m giving and receiving because they both can teach me about myself.

“Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Courage to Change – pg. 244

Today, instead of assuming that they are the problem, I can look at myself to see what needs changing within.

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Session 2 – Candyland Finding Miracles/Blessings in Relationships

How Al-Anon Works – pg. 79

Gratitude enables us to savor the unrecognized good that surrounds us, no matter what the circumstances. As we become accustomed to noticing the positive aspects of our lives, we begin to recognize small, subtle gifts and cloaked opportunities when they appear in our day-to-day experience....Instead of feeling drained, overwhelmed and stressed by the circumstances we encounter, we begin to feel empowered and capable of coping, even flourishing, because we have learned that our Higher Power can use every situation, every relationship, every experience, to enhance our lives and foster strength, faith and personal growth. Thus, *everyone* and *everything* has a special gift to offer us. We need only open our eyes to see it.

Opening our Hearts Transforming our Losses – pg. 45

In times, we discover that we are stronger and more resilient than we sometimes give ourselves credit for. By taking responsibility for our own lives, we begin to recognize that our happiness isn't contingent upon what others do or don't do. As we begin to reclaim our self-worth, we will be more likely to attract healthier relationships based on mutual respect and consideration.



Opening our Hearts Transforming our Losses – pg. 79

When we apply our slogan, "Let it Begin with Me" to our relationships, we can make a concerted effort to put the focus on ourselves. Instead of placing our lives on hold and waiting for others to change, we begin to see what we can do to improve our situation. The more we focus on ourselves, the better equipped we will be to handle whatever changes come our way in our relationships.

Discovering Choices – pg. 103

It was a miracle to learn that I could share the real me—my real feelings, not just what I thought someone wanted to hear. I began to stand up for myself and take responsibility for my actions—or lack of action....I began to stop questioning my ability to have relationships with others. I came to recognize that I already had several successful relationships with people that spanned many years. I didn't always do everything perfectly in those relationships, but those people still loved me. I began to learn to trust my heart in relationships.

As We Understood – pg. 216-217

Dear God, forgive me for doubting that You are working to bring about the very best in my life. I know that I can be fearful, for I have sought to take care of my own problems instead of asking for Your help. When I doubt, would you please get my mind off my fears and help me to remember that You are the power that can bring about miracles in my life.

I've taken so many things for granted, so now I am asking You for a grateful heart that yields in service to others who are in pain. Free me from the desire to change others and help me to love myself, even as You so perfectly love me.

Help me to learn from the past so that I will not continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. Let me be aware of your presence daily. Help me keep my inventory up-to-date, making proper amends, minute by minute, as I need to.

Thank you for showing me love in action in Al-Anon groups. Thank you for meeting all of my needs and for showing me that I need You and Your power each day of my life.

Thank you for the miracle that You are performing in my life and for giving me the gift of life itself.

-West Virginia and Utah, United States