

Workshop(s) on Alcoholism and Loss

The following workshop format can be adapted to accommodate many attendees or only a few. The example presented is based on Chapter Two of *Opening Our Hearts, Transforming Our Losses* (B-29) and is intended to last about two hours. The book contains nine chapters, each ending with a series of questions and each containing a subject suitable for workshop discussion. By including the subjects and questions from other chapters, the format can be expanded as a series of workshops, or one longer workshop.

To keep a positive emphasis on applying Al-Anon tools to the often challenging subject of loss, it is suggested that the speaker and panelists chosen have experience, strength, *and* hope to share on the subject.

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“Loss and the Family Disease of Alcoholism”

- I. The moderator opens with the Serenity Prayer and Al-Anon Preamble. Then the moderator briefly introduces the subject, explaining that loss is such an interwoven part of alcoholism that anyone who has been affected by alcoholism has faced loss, and probably many losses. The moderator also explains that the format of the workshop includes a personal sharing from a member, followed by a group of panelists talking about the subject in round-table discussion, and culminating in the opportunity for all attendees to participate in concurrent round-table discussions.

The moderator concludes the introduction with a reading from Chapter Two, “Living with the Family Disease of Alcoholism,” of *Opening Our Hearts, Transforming Our Losses**, which follows:

“Living with alcoholism can feel like we’re in a constant state of mourning. We may have become so adept at living with loss that we go about our days unaware of its presence. . . .

“Before Al-Anon, we kept ourselves busy seeking solutions for the alcoholic. When what we were trying to accomplish wasn’t succeeding, we told ourselves to work harder or to try something else. We may even have told ourselves it was our fault if we couldn’t convince the alcoholic to get sober. If we could only find the right words at the right time, relayed in just the right tone of voice, then maybe we could get the alcoholic to see things our way. Desperate to fulfill our dreams for a happy family life, we thought that devoting all our energy to the problem was the answer. Little did we know we were actually contributing to the problem by trying to force solutions.

“In Al-Anon we learn that we didn’t cause the alcoholism in our lives, we can’t control it, and we can’t cure it. If we’re trying to force solutions, we can remember “Easy Does It.” Though we can’t expect our lives to always be easy, this slogan suggests that everything doesn’t have to be so hard all the time either. “Easy Does It” reminds us to be gentle with ourselves. We don’t have to try harder or do better. We have tried long and hard enough. Though we may not be able to change the alcoholic, we discover there is one person we can change—ourselves.”

- II. One member gives a ten-to-fifteen minute personal sharing on how he or she has used the program to deal with personal losses accompanying alcoholism.

III. A group of four-to-seven panelists talk about the subject for 20 minutes in a round-table discussion, using one or more of the following questions from the end of Chapter Two of *Opening Our Hearts, Transforming Our Losses*.*

- **Am I still focused on finding help for the alcoholic in my life in a way that might take my focus off my own recovery?**
- **If I am caring for a chronically ill alcoholic, what are my own needs and how can I get them met?**
- **If there were a legitimate crisis occurring in my life today, what Al-Anon tools might help me deal with it constructively?**
- **In what ways have I ever created or contributed to a crisis situation?**
- **If there is a particular loss I fear will happen in the future, why does this potential loss attract my attention so strongly?**

IV. All attendees break into round-table discussion groups of four-to-eight participants, discussing the subject for 40 to 60 minutes using the same list of questions.

V. Summary by moderator, suggesting that now this discussion has begun, we can continue exploring it among program friends, Sponsors, and at meetings. The new book can be a tool to help us examine our losses, but as the book also emphasizes, it is essential that we “talk to each other and reason things out.” End with Suggested Al-Anon/Alateen Closing.

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