



Let's Talk about Safety in Al-Anon Meetings

November 18, 2023

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My ESH . . .

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- As I learned in my days working in the refinery, pretty much all (if not all) of the OSHA (Occupational Safety & Health Administration) guidelines came about because something happened.
- Well . . . this workshop came about because . . . something happened.
- I was attending a meeting at the request of some members here in Colorado to do a group inventory. Another member arrived late, in a rage, and blew up the meeting. The member was physically intimidating, standing, leaning over the table, shouting, cursing and pointing fingers. The member interrupted each other member who tried to speak when there was an opportunity. In the moment, my instinct kicked in that I may have to put myself physically between that member and the others -- like I did with my kids when there was rage in my home. I remembered that fighting fire with fire did not work in my home either. Once the disruptive member left, another member burst into tears and more than one of us were shaking. We then continued the meeting and had a positive, uplifting and solution-oriented meeting. In the following days, as I reflected on the meeting, that experience brought up old fears of being on the receiving end of rage that I had to re-inventory. I then felt a deep sadness -- I had but one experience like that in a meeting. The other members had experienced that same situation before. I felt unsafe physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.
- NO ONE should ever feel unsafe in an AI-Anon meeting. I am grateful for my AI-Anon support system who walked with me through that experience, and for the spiritual

- principles of Faith, Love, Courage, Honesty and Vulnerability, among others that give me the courage to speak up and to lead this workshop.

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Safety in Al-Anon

Have you ever been in an Al-Anon meeting and felt unsafe? What did that feel like to you?

What emotions came up for you?

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Most of the content in this presentation comes from the PDF Let's Talk about Safety in Al-Anon Meetings found on Al-Anon website as a free download. Nancy sent that out with the final agenda for today.

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Definition of Safety . . .

"the condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury."

** Oxford Languages Dictionary

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Safety in Al-Anon

Safety is an important issue in Al-Anon.

- Unity of our Groups (Tradition One)
- Members should expect a meaningful level of safety in meetings
- Members benefit others and themselves when they provide a safe environment

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Safety Includes Four Elements . . .

- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Spiritual

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Autonomy & Group Action

- There is no government / central authority to control or direct behavior
- Formation / operation of an Al-Anon group is guided by the Group Conscience (Tradition Four)
- Membership never contingent on any set of behavioral or moral standards beyond those founded on common sense, courtesy and timeless values of kindness, tolerance and love
- A person can find serenity in Al-Anon and not understand what is acceptable behavior

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What behaviors can be considered a safety issue?

- Sexual harassment or stalking
- Threats of violence
- Bullying
- High-pressure controlling behavior
- Financial coercion
- Racial intolerance
- Sexual orientation or gender identification intolerance; and
- Dominance that pressures Al-Anon members to accept a particular point of view or belief

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What other behaviors can be considered a safety issue?

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So what are our options?

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Group Safety and Unity

Other options include, but are not limited to:

- Develop group guidelines or procedures to help keep the meeting safe
- Al-Anon members can speak to those who are acting inappropriately, being careful to consider everyone's personal safety when doing so
- Situations can be discussed at business meetings, where members can come to a group conscience about how to handle concerns
- A meeting on the Traditions
- As a last resort, ask the disruptive member to stop attending the meeting for a specific period of time
- Calling the proper authorities does not go against any Al-Anon Traditions
- Anonymity is not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behavior

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Dealing with Disruptions

Groups can:

- Mention in their opening announcements that illegal and disruptive behavior are not tolerated
- Ask disruptive members to leave the meeting
- Call the appropriate authorities if disruptive behavior continues or anyone's safety is at risk

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While most groups operate with a healthy balance of spontaneity and structure, there are a number of situations that can threaten group unity and challenge the safety of the group and its members. Often these can center on disruptive individuals—those who are confrontational and aggressive or those who are simply **unwilling to put the needs of the group first.** Such behavior can hijack the focus of a meeting and frighten members, new and old.

Some groups have developed plans for addressing disruptive behavior and have established procedures through their group consciences to ensure that the group's welfare is protected. In many cases, disruptive behavior is preempted by having the Chairperson state the expectations for behavior in the meeting.

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Most importantly . . .

- Anonymity is not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behavior
- Al-Anon membership does not grant anyone immunity under the law
- No Al-Anon group has to tolerate illegal behavior
- Any activity within an Al-Anon meeting is subject to the same laws that apply outside the meeting

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Questions . . .

1. What makes us feel safe in Al-Anon meetings?
2. What makes us feel unsafe in Al-Anon meetings?
3. What are our options when we feel unsafe?
4. How could our meetings be affected if they become unsafe?

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Workshop

- Four scenarios
- Break into groups
- Discuss - 20 minutes
- Report back - 15 minutes

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Four Scenarios . . .

1. What Legacies apply to each scenario?
2. What spiritual principles can we bring into the conversation?
3. Answer the question for each scenario.
4. Report back . . .

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Scenario One . . .

A new member starts to share and continues for an extended time. During the next hour they continue to respond to each sharing at length. How would you handle that situation as the Chairperson?

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Scenario Two . . .

A long-term member, who has a strong religious faith, has started to quote scripture and make religious references during the meetings. What is a good way to handle this situation in order to avoid conflict?

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Scenario Three . . .

When arriving at your meeting, you are asked if you had heard any details about another member's fight with their alcoholic partner. What would your response be (regardless if you had or had not heard about the incident)?

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Scenario Four . . .

A newcomer arrives alone at your Al-Anon meeting and it becomes clear that they have been drinking, but are not disruptive. After a few minutes, the newcomer states they are the partner of one of your members, who has since arrived at the meeting. Before long, the newcomer becomes belligerent and disruptive. How would you handle the situation?

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References:

Document on Safety:

[https://al-anon.org/pdf/Safety-in-A
l-Anon-meetings.pdf](https://al-anon.org/pdf/Safety-in-A
l-Anon-meetings.pdf)

Thank you!

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