

## **Facing My Struggles with Intimacy**

Having grown up with alcoholism, I learned very early on that it was not safe to talk openly and honestly or to trust what people told me. To survive, I shut down and ignored or denied my feelings. Under those circumstances, it's no surprise that by the time I found Al-Anon, I had serious problems with letting anyone know the real me. Eventually, I didn't even want to know who I was, which is why I put so much focus on everyone around me!

My struggles with intimacy didn't magically vanish in Al-Anon, but the program certainly increased my awareness of how little connectedness I felt with others. Every aspect of our fellowship helped me begin learning how to talk, trust, and feel. While no one insisted I speak at meetings, they gently encouraged me to share myself with them. For the first time in my life, I felt that there were people who wanted to listen to me. As they opened their hearts to me and shared intimately about their own lives, both in meetings and in one-on-one conversations, I began to trust them. My progress was slow (sometimes painfully so), but as I gradually began to reveal more of myself and no one at the meetings criticized or rejected me for it, my trust grew. Feeling my feelings took a little longer, but as I listened to others share their feelings, I began to relate.

One of the main reasons that Al-Anon increases my ability to be intimate is that I'm not doing it in a vacuum, or in the case of my childhood, in an environment where intimacy was discouraged or mocked. Everyone else is learning to be intimate too. We're all at different stages of growth, but that's a plus. Those further along give me hope. Those just beginning

the process remind me how far I've come and give me the opportunity to pass on the encouragement that I've already received.

My path to intimacy may have its ups and downs, but by practicing "Progress Not Perfection," today I appreciate how connected I feel to the world I live in and to the people around me. It is so much better than I ever thought possible!

*By Tom C., Michigan*

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