

Crosstalk—or lo

The “Suggested Welcome” for Al-Anon meetings, as published in the *Service Manual* says: “The loving interchange of help among members and daily reading of Al-Anon/Alateen literature thus makes us ready to receive the priceless gift of serenity.”

Since we don’t give advice, the loving interchange is one of the most significant gifts we can give each

At one meeting, a newcomer was asking a lot of questions out of turn. She was there because she had a severe problem with drinking in her home, but she didn’t know that she wasn’t supposed to ask questions and that we weren’t supposed to answer them. As a meeting, we didn’t quite know how to respond to her. We could say: “We’ll answer your questions after the meeting.” But

Since we don’t give advice, the loving interchange is on

other. We come to Al-Anon meetings for understanding and support. We also come to Al-Anon because we have unhealthy relationships, and we come to Al-Anon meetings to learn—and to experience—how to communicate with others in a healthy way.

Some meetings, however, enforce strict rules against “crosstalk.” I think this term comes from group psychotherapy, not from our Al-Anon traditions. I’m concerned that enforcing rigid rules against crosstalk makes the atmosphere of our meetings unfriendly to newcomers as well as less than supportive to our members. We lose the “loving interchange” when we care more about the rule against crosstalk than about giving our peers emotional support.

what about the loving interchange *during* the meeting? From the newcomer’s perspective, what’s the meeting for, if her questions can’t be answered until after the meeting?

At another meeting, one member was going through a very difficult time. She was depressed and said she was considering suicide. When she was done, the group said, “Thanks for sharing.” And her concerns were ignored by everyone else, who shared only on whatever was going on in their own lives. The group didn’t need to recommend treatment centers, medication, or non-CAL literature. But someone could have spoken a sympathetic word and talked about a personal experience that was relevant to the person in the most pain.

The opinions expressed here are strictly those of the person who gave them, and

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By Martha C., Virginia



e of the most significant gifts we can give each other.

We don't want our meetings to be dominated by one person. We don't want them dominated by two people, one giving advice to the other. But on balance, we may have become too rigid in enforcing the rule against "crosstalk"—and what we've lost is the loving interchange, which we need if we're going to be a welcoming place for newcomers who are in need.

Broadly speaking, we have two choices: A small meeting of long-time members, strictly enforcing the "rules" against "crosstalk;" or a meeting where loving interchange is the practice, creating a more positive and welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

My suggestion is that we should discourage groups from inserting language about crosstalk in their

Welcome, because it conflicts with the "loving interchange" in the *Service Manual's* Suggested Welcome. Maybe it's time to "talk to each other" to see how we can maintain that loving interchange without interrupting one another or giving advice.

Editorial Note: If readers respond to this letter c/o The Forum, we can forward each response to the writer. Please indicate if you are willing to have us consider your response for publication in a future issue of The Forum and on the Al-Anon members' Web site. For another perspective on this topic, see p. 19 in the December, 2004 Forum, "Al-Anon B.C. (Before 'Crosstalk')" by Mary Ann K. This article is available on the Members' Web site at www.al-anon.alateen.org/members

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