

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 of the Dream”

- 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. One of the more subtle, and often unrecognized losses is the loss of hopes and dreams. The moderator also explains that the format of the workshop includes a brief reading, followed several members individually addressing questions about this topic from their own experience, strength, and hope, 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 Three, “Loss of the Dream,” of *Opening Our Hearts, Transforming Our Losses**, which follows:

“When we first come to Al-Anon, many of us question what has become of our lives. We may be clinging to past hopes and dreams, or to memories of the alcoholic before the drinking began. We may be reluctant to accept our losses, fearing that our grief will consume us if we acknowledge it. We may not have had the relationship we wanted nor were we treated in the ways we hoped or expected. To cope with our pain, we may have created a fantasy of the perfect family, the perfect childhood, the perfect relationship, or the perfect life.

“There lies a delicate balance between avoiding our pain and giving ourselves time to deal with it. We don’t want to circumvent our grief, nor do we want to force ourselves to confront it before we are ready. Much like a child who needs the comfort of a security blanket, we may need to hold on to our dreams until we become ready to face life without them. We wouldn’t rip away the blanket, nor would we reprimand the child for needing it. We trust that, when feeling safe enough, the child will let go of it. We can afford ourselves this same compassion and understanding, trusting that when the time is right we will be ready to face our losses.

“Many of us didn’t get the lives we hoped for, but obsessing about what we perceive to be life’s unfairness only sets us up for more misery. Eventually we learn to accept what is, even if it’s not the way we would like it to be.

“In Al-Anon no one tried to help restore my lost dreams. Miraculously, I found that while I could not change the course of my family history, I had the strength and support of my program to allow me to rebuild a new and far richer life for myself than I ever could have planned or dreamed.”*

II. Three or four members give three-to-five minute personal sharings responding to one of the following questions from the end of Chapter Three of *Opening Our Hearts, Transforming Our Losses*.*

- **How is my life different from what I had hoped for as a child? What can I still change and what do I have to accept?**
- **Am I ready to forgive myself for the mistakes I've made?**
- **What is my usual attitude when something in my life goes in a direction I didn't plan or anticipate?**
- **What new dreams are possible for me today?**

III. All attendees break into round-table discussion groups of four-to-eight participants, discussing the subject for 30 minutes using the same list of questions.

IV. 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 another quotation from Chapter Three and the Suggested AI-Anon/Alateen Closing.

“AI-Anon may not be able to give us back everything we have lost, but it can restore our sense of hope. By learning to focus on ourselves, we find that peace and contentment are possible, even in the midst of uncertainty. As we gain strength and self-confidence, we find that we have loosened our grip on the dreams we once held so tightly. Before long, we realize we're building new dreams.

“An occasional glance over my shoulder is all right. It shows me how far I've come and how much I don't want to go back there.”*

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