

A Guideline for Workshops on **Alcoholism and Relationships**

Using *Discovering Choices* (B-30)



The following workshop format can be adapted to accommodate any given timeframe, audience of Al Anon members, or number of attendees. It includes a generalized format for opening and closing, with seven topics to choose from for the specific focus of the workshop. All seven topics are based on chapters from *Discovering Choices* (B-30). The topics are presented to provide a variety of options, but other topics can be created using other chapters and following the same format. The other nine chapters not included also end with a series of questions, and each contains a subject suitable for workshop discussion, so there are plenty of other choices readily available.

To prepare for the workshop, first select the topic (or topics) to be covered from the following list:

- **We Start from Where We Are** (Denial and acceptance)
- **Creating Balance within Ourselves** (Self-awareness)
- **Detachment with Love** (Letting go)
- **Choosing Happiness** (Working the program)
- **Through Prayer and Meditation** (Using Step Eleven)
- **Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service: Guides for Our Relationships** (What else can we say?)
- **Meaningful Relationships** (Defining success)

The list of workshop topics, like the chapters of *Discovering Choices*, follow a process of recovery, beginning with information more pertinent to newcomers and gradually moving on to more involved subjects. Include the specific topic(s) in any announcements for the workshop. Then select four panelists, giving each of them one of the four discussion questions listed for the topic, and ask them to be prepared to discuss/answer the question in up to ten minutes. If the workshop contains one topic, it will probably last one to two hours, so plan accordingly.

“Alcoholism and Relationships”

- I. The moderator opens with the Serenity Prayer and AIAnon Preamble. Then the moderator briefly introduces the specific subject (see list of seven topics above), and explains that the format of the workshop will include a brief reading of text and a personal story from *Discovering Choices*, (B-30), AIAnon’s new book on recovery in relationships. This will be followed by personal sharings on four different questions related to the topic, with four AIAnon members/panelists each sharing on a different question for up to ten minutes each. After the panelists have covered all four questions, all attendees are invited to either break into smaller discussion groups to focus on one or more of the questions, or speak at an open microphone session, again addressing one or more of the four questions.
- II. Using one of the sets of topics above, ask an attendee to read the selected text from *Discovering Choices*. (See the following pages for readings.)
- III. Ask another attendee to read the selected personal story from *Discovering Choices*. (See the following pages for stories.)
- IV. Introduce the panel of four speakers, each addressing one of the four accompanying questions, for up to ten minutes each. (See the following pages for questions.)
- V. A handout sheet with the topic, quotation, and the four questions is given to all participants. All attendees break into round-table discussion groups to discuss as many of the four questions as they wish, or members are invited to come up to the microphone and briefly address one of the questions in front of the entire group.
- VI. 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 relationships, using program friends and tools to “talk to each other and reason things out,” growing along the way. End with Suggested AIAnon/AIateen Closing.

Topic Choice One

We Start from Where We Are

Text Reading:

From page 10

“Wherever we may be in our search for healthy relationships, we have to begin where we are today. It may be painful to think how much better our relationships could have—or should have—been. There’s no point in criticizing ourselves when we did the best we could with what we had. We can gain peace of mind by putting aside what we could or should have done and by accepting who and where we are right now.

“The AlAnon program offers a range of tools that can help us. As we continue to attend meetings, we learn that it is possible to let go of old companions like failure, shame, and guilt. In time we can make progress, but we can only make it “One Day at a Time.” The AlAnon tools help us realize that the ability to start over is always within our reach, and that there’s always more hope than we may have thought.”*

Personal Story:

From pages 17-18

“Before I came into AlAnon, my relationship with my wife had deteriorated to the point that we could not communicate with one another. The only discussions we had were heated arguments, and there was little communication in those. I treated her like a child, trying to manage all aspects of her life and sort things out when there were problems.

“In AlAnon I learned that my managing and helping were preventing my wife from facing the consequences of her actions. I was allowing her to carry on in the same way without any reason to change. I learned that letting go and letting God was the best thing I could do. Without my interference, my wife found sobriety, and gradually our communication has improved. I am grateful that through our programs our marriage has gotten better.”*

Questions:

1. How healthy are the relationships in my life?
2. If I were not so worried about someone else’s situation, what would I be doing?
3. How would I like my relationships to develop?
4. What positive qualities do I contribute when I interact with others?

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Topic Choice Two

Creating Balance within Ourselves

Text Reading:

From page 109

“Those of us who have lived with the effects of alcoholism can become obsessed with the behavior of others. We spend time analyzing behavior, figuring out motives, and identifying what we deem is wrong with the people in our lives. In AlAnon we learn that excessive scrutiny of others can be counter-productive. From the first meeting, we are reminded to keep the focus on ourselves, not on the alcoholics in our lives. We soon discover that we can’t build healthy relationships until we know who we are.”*

Personal Story:

From pages 116-117

“To me the word “relationship” used to be a four-letter word. I cringed whenever I thought of how I related to others. I thought I was supposed to change myself to fit what other people wanted me to be. I used to believe that other people would only be happy if I acted the way they wanted. Of course, my goal was to make others happy.

“Learning to relate—and not to mirror or mimic—was something I learned slowly in AlAnon. The idea that helped most was to keep the focus on myself. What was my favorite color? What activities did I think were fun? By embarking on a path of self-discovery, I learned that there were many gray areas about myself—pieces that had only been partially discovered. With the help of my Sponsor, I began the life-long journey of discovering who I am, because each day I change and grow.

“Discovering who I am has set me free. Today I know that I love the color green, but I don’t like to wear it. I also know that my assets can become defects if I let them gain too much importance. I am grateful there is not a time limit on when I need to know myself. I pass on this gentle way of living from my AlAnon friends to others with another four-letter word: love.”*

Questions:

1. How honest am I when I share my feelings with others? To what extent do I mask what I truly feel? How much of what I am saying is what I think others want to hear?
2. How do I define emotional intimacy?
3. In my past and current relationships, what has been the balance between giving and taking? Do I have a tendency to do—or to expect—one more than the other?
4. If I went into a relationship expecting someone else to “complete me,” what did I think I was lacking that another person could provide? How did that affect the relationship as it developed?

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Topic Choice Three

Detachment with Love

Text Reading:

From page 149

“Many of us justify our actions by telling ourselves that we’re good people who love others, care about them, and do what we do for their own good. When we first hear about detachment, we might think it requires us to stop loving and stop caring. But detachment with love doesn’t mean that we cease to care about another person. It doesn’t even mean that we care about ourselves more than another person. It simply means that we let go of our attempts to change what is beyond our power to change. There is great love in accepting ourselves for who we are. There is also great love in accepting the alcoholic as a person trapped in an overpowering illness.”*

Personal Story:

From page 157

“As a single mother with a son to raise, I felt an enormous burden. I felt that I was totally responsible for how my son turned out, and that if I didn’t do the right thing at all times, he would turn out badly.

“My son had a lot of difficulties while he was growing up. I got into AlAnon just as he was starting his senior year in high school. His grades and performance in school had suffered because he refused to do his homework. That year, I told him that I was going to let him be responsible for how he did in school and that I would no longer remind, scold, or nag him to do his homework.

“It was a difficult year for me, and I had to bite my tongue almost every day. For the most part, though, I succeeded. His graduation from high school was a celebration because he knew he did it himself. He was so proud of himself, and I was able to be proud of him for his accomplishments.

“Our relationship has continued to improve. I have learned that I cannot change him; I can only support him. Little by little, I have been able to let him be his own man while I stand by and cheer him on.”*

Questions:

1. Why am I so concerned about someone else’s actions?
2. How can letting go of others help me?
3. What old attitudes can I let go of today?
4. How have my boundaries changed since coming to AlAnon?

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Topic Choice Four Choosing Happiness

Text Reading:

From page 169

“Some members describe acceptance as “living life on life’s terms.” Acceptance means putting aside the wish that our situation could be different from what it is. It’s a costly luxury to worry, obsess, criticize, or pine for something that we can’t have. We pay for this luxury with what we could have: the peace of mind that is available to us today. To reach acceptance of our present circumstances, it is important to come to peace with our past and to heal old wounds. This work in turn assures us that we won’t recreate our past relationships in the future.”*

Personal Story:

From pages 179-180

“After working through the Steps for the first time, I was astounded and gratified to learn how much better I understood my alcoholic father. I did my Fourth Step on my relationship with my dad, and for the first time in my life I came to know, love, and accept him for who he was. I saw so many qualities in him I hadn’t seen before. I saw how my attitudes, behaviors, and judgment of him had built a solid wall of anger and resentment that no one could penetrate. Sadly, my father had died several years before, but through the use of Steps Eight and Nine, I was able to write my dad a letter of amends. I developed a new relationship with him even after death. I felt so close to him, and I allowed myself to go back in time and let that little girl sit in his lap and hug and kiss him. I allowed myself to see us together walking hand in hand. I felt the love, nurturing, and security I had not experienced before”*

Questions:

1. What are the rewards—and consequences—of thinking of myself as a victim?
2. What can I do today to better accept myself as I am?
3. How has a Sponsor helped me gain a realistic view of the share of responsibility that I have for certain problems?
4. How can working Steps Four through Eight help me make changes that can bring more happiness into to my life?

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Topic Choice Five Through Prayer and Meditation

Text Reading:

From page 200

“The Eleventh Step reminds us that just because we can’t see how things might work out at the present moment, it doesn’t mean a way won’t reveal itself later. We don’t have to know the answers in advance. We’re not responsible for the answers. As we learn to let go, however, we can see how things can be resolved, seemingly on their own. Eventually, we learn to trust the process. Over time, we gain confidence that everything will turn out for the best. Many of us eventually find that we’ve developed what some people might call faith.”*

Personal Story:

From page 203

“At meetings I was introduced to a Power greater than myself who was completely different from the God I had brought there. As I learned how to work the Twelve Steps, I discovered how to build a relationship with my Higher Power.

“I use prayer to talk to my Higher Power. I have learned that although I can say anything I want, it’s best if I pray for His will to be done. The Higher Power I’ve come to know has my best interest at heart and can see the outcome of everything, though I cannot.

“Meditation helps me hear what my Higher Power says to me. I’ve learned over years of practice to sit still and quiet my mind. My Higher Power has so much to say to me.

“I can only guess at what my answers ought to be, but He *knows*. This relationship is the most valuable thing I have. No matter who enters or leaves my life, my Higher Power will remain.”*

Questions:

1. What changes do I need to make in order to integrate prayer and meditation into my daily routine?
2. When I reach out to my Higher Power, how patient am I for what I believe to be an answer?
3. How do my ideas about “control” affect my concept of a Higher Power?
4. How difficult is it for me to put my relationships into the care of a Higher Power, without knowing how their future will unfold?

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Topic Choice Six

Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service: Guides for Our Relationships

Text Reading:

From pages 261, 265

“The Twelve Steps provide us with a framework for recovery, making it possible for us to have more satisfying personal relationships. The Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service complement and augment the recovery we can attain from the Steps with principles for positive and productive interpersonal relationships. The Traditions and Concepts help people live and work together harmoniously in our groups, in AIA non service, and in our daily lives.”

“The Traditions and Concepts show how we can share common values and allow for individual expression by defining clear boundaries. We take responsibility for ourselves and respect the rights of others. It’s a combination of “Keep it Simple” and “Live and Let Live.”*

Personal Story:

From page 278

“For a long time, I had been treating my alcoholic husband as an enemy who was out to destroy me. Now sober, he was expecting me to work with him and be a partner. This approach was a whole new way of thinking for both of us. We had never really seen it work in a marriage before—certainly not in our homes while we were growing up or among any of our drinking friends.

“Then we heard a speaker one night who talked about how the Steps were for her relationship with God, the Traditions were for her relationship with others, and the Concepts were for her relationship with the world at large. What an answer to a prayer! I could work on the Traditions to help me learn how to live with others.”*

Questions:

1. How do I work with those around me, whether at home or at work, to come to a decision that benefits each of us and all of us together?
2. In what ways am I fully self-supporting? In what situations have I expected others to rescue me?
3. How often do I participate in discussions with those I love, allowing my opinions to be heard and extending the same courtesy to others, even when they disagree with me?
4. Once a mutual decision has been made, whether at home or at work, how willing am I to abide by that decision without resentments?

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Topic Choice Seven

Meaningful Relationships

Text Reading:

From page 302

“Although we may not understand exactly how we were able to make progress, that understanding isn’t necessary. The examples of countless AIAnon members show us that progress is possible. We share with these members at meetings. We meet them while doing service projects. We read their stories in our Conference Approved Literature. It isn’t necessary to believe blindly that AIAnon works, but scientific proof isn’t necessary either. There are many AIAnon members who are willing to share their program with us, and their serenity is obvious to anyone who takes the time to speak with them.”*

Personal Story:

From page 303

“Through the interaction and practice with individuals in my AIAnon group, I now have loving, accepting, and compassionate relationships. I have made many new friends through the program. I have come to look upon AIAnon as my second family. The tools of this program have helped me in all my relationships—with children, at work, and in everyday life. It has given me a safe and secure environment in which to grow and learn to love myself as well. “Today I don’t have that aching, burning need to fill a void by using someone or something. I have come to understand my Higher Power’s love for me. I have come to understand the difference between wanting a significant other in my life and needing a significant other in my life.”*

Questions:

1. How do I define success in my relationships today?
2. In what ways have I found hope for continued growth?
3. Which AIAnon tools have helped me the most in my relationships?
4. What are some specific incidents where I feel I have served as an example to others that AIAnon works?

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