

## Preface

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There are no simple answers to the difficult and complex challenges of relationships affected by alcoholism. As Al-Anon members, we have a wide range of experience in dealing with every type of difficulty that results from our relationships with problem drinkers. Yet as we share our experience, strength, and hope in the mutually supportive environment of Al-Anon meetings, we often discover possibilities and positive choices. In applying the principles of the Al-Anon program to our own lives, many of us find an inner strength that has a positive effect on all of our personal relationships.

This book brings together a cross-section of the wisdom and insight that many of us uncover in Al-Anon as we search for understanding, integrity, harmony, and love in our relationships. In this book, we share how we use the tools offered by the program to learn about ourselves and discover spiritual resources we didn't know we had. Our opportunities for progress depend only upon how well we keep our focus on what is within our power to change. As one Al-Anon member shares in this book, "My family is doing the best they can. As I gradually let go, however, I find that their view no longer makes the sky any less blue for me."

In Al-Anon Family Groups we discover these choices are available to all of us, provided that we're able to put our relationship problems in perspective and open ourselves to whatever each day offers. By putting our own lives on more solid footing, we can have a positive effect in our interactions with others, ultimately improving the quality of all of our relationships. While there's no instant solution, we discover in Al-Anon that there are more choices available to us than we had thought. This book shares with you some of those possibilities.



# *We Start from Where We Are*

We come to Al-Anon because of the problems caused by someone's drinking. Some of us are primarily concerned about a relationship with a spouse or partner who has a drinking problem, while others have alcoholic parents or children. Sometimes an alcoholic situation in the workplace brings us to Al-Anon. Regardless of the particular relationship, there is one common denominator: the effect of someone else's drinking on us. Al-Anon gives us an opportunity to look at ourselves and understand how alcoholism has distorted our perspective, hurt our self-image, and affected our ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

It isn't unusual to enter the doors of an Al-Anon Family Group in a state of distress. Despite the confusion and chaos we may be experiencing, the program offers us hope that by improving our attitudes, we can live better, happier lives. In Al-Anon meetings we meet people who have had experiences similar to ours. They share how much their lives have improved. They show us that our past failures don't have to limit our future growth as long as we are willing to learn new approaches.

An Al-Anon Family Group also offers opportunities to understand our own feelings better, and how to reach out to other people for support. Before we began attending Al-Anon meetings, many of us ignored our feelings and felt isolated by our problems. We focused primarily on trying to fix the alcoholic relationship or coping with the crisis of the day. We tried to keep things as "normal" as possible by taking on responsibilities that the alcoholic

neglected. It was all up to us, or so we believed. We felt we had to keep up the appearance that everything was okay, even if that meant making excuses or lying for the alcoholic. Under these circumstances, it can be painful or confusing to pay attention to our own feelings. When we hear other people share in the meetings, however, we begin to recognize how much we have in common with them. As we relate, we begin to feel connected—sometimes for the first time in our lives. Trust begins to grow.

An Al-Anon meeting is a safe place to share our feelings. We learn that we're not the only ones whose point of view has been twisted by the strain of living with the effects of someone else's drinking. As we listen to other people's stories, we discover things about ourselves that we may have never suspected. We can begin to admit to ourselves how we feel and come to understand ourselves better. With the love and support we find in an Al-Anon meeting, we're able to recognize—and accept—who we are.

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 Al-Anon 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 Al-Anon 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.

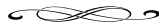
## ***Personal Stories***

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I was full of anguish when I first arrived at Al-Anon. Real progress came when I understood that I am responsible only for the consequences of my own behavior and choices. In time I came to understand that much of my family members' lives was none of my business. I had no right to judge them as right or wrong, much less interfere with their lives, even if they asked for my opinion.

My greatest progress in overcoming the urge to get involved in others' lives came when I recognized that I don't always know what's going to turn out to be a good thing. As I listened at meetings, I realized that many an idea that I thought would be the best possible solution turned into a complete disaster. On the other hand, things I thought would surely stigmatize and ruin lives turned out to be someone's salvation.

If I can't recognize whether the consequence of an action will turn out good or bad, how can I possibly make a reliable judgment for others? My only responsibility is to put the focus on my behavior, understand my family, and try to be non-judgmental. I stopped judging my family, and I now accept them for who they are. I do my best to give unconditional love.



My first Sponsor asked me how I felt, but I didn't know. Ever since I was a little boy, I had been told how to feel by my family. I took a consensus—and that's how I felt. It took a lot of courage to begin to feel my own emotions. I heard a man say that for most men, emotions are the slimy things you find when you lift up a rock. That really rang true for me.

My Sponsor said my feelings are mine and I have a right to feel them. What is really important is what I do with them. I have the right to be angry, but I don't have the right to be verbally or physically abusive. I often find that the root of my anger with someone else is a problem I have yet to address within myself.

In Al-Anon I have learned that the guilt I feel is like a brick I carry in my pocket—I choose to carry it. I can let it go through honesty and amends. I can deal with my fear by living today, “One Day at a Time.” That cuts my problems down to a manageable size. Now I can choose to feel joy and happiness. There is no charge for feeling them.



I recently spent ten days on a trip in a motor home with my grown daughter. We had a great time. We both applied the principles of this program to our lives. We gave each other space and time alone. We could disagree without being disagreeable. It was the most memorable trip I have ever taken.

It wasn't always like that. When my three children were young, I was still sick from the effects of alcoholism. The day my daughter got married, she told me she would never come back into our crazy hell-hole of a home again. She said she never wanted to see me or her father again. A year-and-a-half later, she gave me a cigarette lighter as a holiday gift. It was engraved: “To Mom, from your daughter.” I knew that inscription meant that she wanted to be my daughter again. Because of my years in Al-Anon, we are friends today. She calls me and we go to plays or movies together.

When we came home from the trip, people asked me if we were still speaking. I just laughed. My daughter is the joy of my life and a wonderful friend.

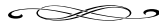


Growing up in an alcoholic family, I was a very angry person. I had no friends, no self-esteem, and no ability to trust anyone. I had no idea how to love myself. I didn't know how to take responsibility for my thoughts, words, or actions. I didn't know the difference between honesty and dishonesty. I was just like my alcoholic dad. In Al-Anon I learned that the only difference between us was that I do not have a compulsion to drink.



I am a grown man who has been around alcoholism all of my life. I didn't realize how much the disease had affected me. I ended up getting married, having children, and treating them the same way I had been treated.

Through Al-Anon meetings I learned that I only need to take care of myself. Other things will take care of themselves.



My wife was in Al-Anon for 12 years before I began in A.A. She started getting better while I got sicker. She used detachment with love. I got sick enough to hit bottom; I got into A.A., and our relationship started to get better. We both got involved in service. But ten years later, I was still making bad choices and trying to fix them all by myself. Things kept building up until I just wanted to end it all. Then one day an Al-Anon member asked if I would like to come to an Al-Anon meeting. That first meeting was on self-esteem.

My relationship with my wife is better today than it has ever been. We say "I love you," and we do things together. We also let each other do things and go places on our own. We work our own programs. I thank God as I understand Him for helping me find Al-Anon and A.A. and for keeping our family together. Our house has become a home again.



As an active member of Al-Anon, I continue to experience startling spiritual awakenings. Recently I was disappointed in several family members who did not do what I wanted. The disappointment became so intense and painful that I finally sought God and surrendered myself and all my old ideas about how my life should be. I experienced sorrow and grief in letting go of expectations. I stayed with the grief until God revealed the truth to me. It was