

The Path to Unity Through the Traditions: A Workshop Using the Traditions for Conflict Resolution

Instructions and Introduction

Workshop Introduction

Everyone experiences conflict. It is a fact of life, whether it is conflict in a family, with a friend or neighbor, a co-worker, or a member of our Al-Anon Family Group.

When we arrive at the door of our first Al-Anon meeting, our lives are full of conflict. Al-Anon gives us the tools to help us deal more effectively with conflict. The Three Legacies; the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts are the foundation of our wonderful program. The slogans, the Serenity Prayer, the daily readers and the many other pieces of Conference Approved Literature provide us with an abundance of resources to cope with any difficulty that comes our way.

Meetings are a special tool to help us resolve conflicts. The sharing of hope, experience and strength member-to-member is a potent resource in dealing with the daily conflicts in our lives. Sponsorship is a tool too often underutilized in our toolbox. Having a personal sponsor provides not only a sounding board for our grievances, but spiritual guidance to remind us of what resources are at our disposal, not the least of which is “a conscious contact with our Higher Power,” the source of all wisdom in our lives.

This workshop has been designed to use one of the three Legacies as a guide to conflict resolution. Unity through the Traditions can provide “harmony and growth” not only in our Al-Anon groups and the worldwide fellowship as a whole, but also in our personal lives. The Traditions help us relate to each other in the group setting and with other groups. When people come together often, there is a difference of opinion and conflict. The Traditions can be used as tools to guide us to act appropriately in working through conflict. By seeking our Higher Power’s guidance, we are often led to solutions that were not apparent to us.

Workshop Instructions

This workshop is designed to be a low-tech discussion, no PowerPoint required. The workshop could be as short as an hour or as long as two or three hours. The workshop may be held as a seated discussion or as a gallery walk. Instructions for both types of workshops follow.

Seated Discussion Style Workshop

You will need:

1. *Paths To Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts* (B-24)
2. Index cards or paper with individual the Traditions, Quotes and Questions already printed on them. One copy for a small group that will remain together or multiple copies, one for each small breakout group.
3. Paper for the group recorders to record highlights of the discussions.

We recommend breaking large groups into smaller groups of approximately four-to-ten people. This can be done by counting off in numbers up to four or as many small groups as you want to form. If you have a small group, you may all remain together. If you break into smaller groups, have the groups select one person to be the recorder who will report to the large group a summary of the discussion. Assign work areas for each small group.

You may have the small groups discuss a different set of Traditions, or have each group discuss all Twelve Traditions. Each small group will need a copy of the Traditions, Quotes and Questions that follows.

For a one-hour workshop, all Twelve Traditions may be discussed briefly. For more in-depth discussion, limit the workshop to four-to-six Traditions. For a two-hour or longer workshop, you will have time to discuss all Twelve Traditions.

For a one-hour workshop, have the small groups spend five minutes on each Tradition. If you are discussing only four Traditions, the groups can spend 12 minutes on each or seven-to-eight minutes on each if you are discussing six Traditions.

Begin the workshop in the usual manner and a reading of all of the Traditions. Read the introduction provided above. There is also a brief comment on each Tradition that can be read by the leader/facilitator of the discussion.

The facilitator will call time when the groups should move to the next Tradition. If working in small groups, the Recorder of each group should note highlights on each Tradition to share with the large group at the end of the workshop. The facilitator may quietly roam the room observing or answering any questions.

In the last five-to-ten minutes of the workshop, call everyone together and have the Recorders share one highlight for each Tradition with the whole group.

You will need:

1. *Paths To Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions and Concepts* (B-24)
2. Flip chart, several different colored markers, and tape to hang the flip chart paper.
3. Copies of the Traditions, Quotes and Questions attached.
4. Paper for the group recorders to record highlights of the discussions.

In a gallery walk workshop, the small groups move around the room together, working on one Tradition at a time in different locations. Post each Tradition being discussed on a piece of flip chart paper and hang these on the walls around the room. Try to space them so that a group of four-to-ten people could stand in front of them and talk without disturbing the other groups.

Have as many groups as the number of Traditions you will be discussing if you are doing the gallery walk style workshop. If you are covering all Twelve Traditions, break into 12 groups and have 12 pieces of flip chart paper hanging around the room. Have the Quotes and Questions for each Tradition written on individual index card, or copies made for each small group Reporter to read as the groups move around the room.

For a one-hour workshop, have the small groups spend five minutes on each Tradition. If you are discussing only four Traditions, the groups can spend 12 minutes or seven-to-eight minutes on each if you are discussing six Traditions. The facilitator will call time when the groups should move to the next Tradition. The recorder for each group will be given a different colored marker and will write the groups' comments on the flip chart paper. That way you can tell which group wrote which comments.

Begin the workshop in the usual manner and a reading of all of the Traditions. Read the introduction provided above. Distribute the index cards (or pages) of Quotations and Questions to the recorder for each group. There is also a brief comment on each Tradition that can be read by each small group's Recorder as they get to each Tradition.

The facilitator will call time when the groups should move to the next Tradition. The facilitator may quietly roam the room observing or answering any questions on the process if you break into smaller groups.

In the last 5 to 10 minutes of the workshop, call everyone together to share one highlight for each Tradition with the whole group. The facilitator or the Recorders can read some of the highlights posted on the Flip chart paper from around the room.

Other Resources

Traditions Blog on the Members' Web site www.alanon.alateen.org/members

The Dilemma of an Alcoholic- Marriage (B-4)

Discovering Choices (B-30)

The Path to Unity Through the Traditions:

A Workshop Using the Traditions for Conflict Resolution

(See Instructions for Workshop)

Tradition One

Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.

***Leader introduction:** The principles of common welfare and unity in Tradition One create a positive environment that is conducive to resolving conflict. How to resolve it is unfamiliar to most of us; however "within a loving, spiritual community, each of us has the best chance for personal progress..."¹ Tradition One gives me balance. I do not have to control the group, but I also do not have to subordinate my needs to others.*

"We must place our trust in a God of our understanding to lead us to decisions for our common good and we must practice the principles we know have worked for others in our fellowship. We are not perfect, we often have strong conflicts, but we work our way through them with the Traditions and our trust in a Higher Power."²

"For unity to exist in my family or my group all of us must have a voice. No one voice is more or less important than anyone else's. I have a responsibility to listen, to share and to accept. Tradition One lifted the burden of control off of my shoulders. I no longer had the right to make decisions for everyone."³

1. What tools can I use to examine my motives that contribute to the conflict?
2. How is my behavior contributing to unity?
3. How do I react to others whose opinions and ideas are different from my own?

¹ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 135

² Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 137-138

³ Paths To Recovery (B-24) page 139

Tradition Two

For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern.

Leader introduction: I learn to trust my Higher Power, myself, and others in the group. I learn that though I am powerless over others, no one wields power over me. I am free to think and feel as I choose. I can decide to stay in a relationship or group situation, or leave if I do not like it.

“Through trial and error, we learn it is best not to force a particular decision or to continually restate our views.” “If our own position is not that of the group as a whole, we learn to support the decision reached....It takes time to trust in the group conscience process.”⁴

When conflict arises, placing our trust in a Power greater than ourselves is critical to clear judgment. “When tempers flare, listening for guidance is hard but important.” “When we all seek God’s will, there can be no winning or losing, but only a journey to greater understanding.”⁵

1. What tools of the program can I use while engaged in an emotionally charged conflict?
2. How can good listening skills help yield new ideas or compromises?
3. If the outcome of a group conscience is one that I do not agree with, how do I respond?

⁴ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 145, 146

⁵ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 145, 146

Tradition Three

The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.

Leader introduction: As individuals, we all hold various opinions, political views, and religious beliefs. We are required to leave these affiliations outside the meeting room doors. Al-Anon's non-affiliation with outside causes help us to avoid controversy that could damage our unity of purpose—helping those who have been affected by alcoholism. This guides me to look for what I have in common with those I am in conflict with; we all love the Al-Anon program and are working for what we think is best. We have all been affected by the family disease. We have experienced fear and lack of trust. Instead of focusing on how I am different, I look for ways I am the same. When we focus on what we agree upon, we find that our conflicts become more manageable.

We learn that Al-Anon does not affiliate with any other cause or outside entity; it would divert the fellowship from our primary purpose. This reminds us that when we find ourselves in conflict, it may help to define a clear purpose and focus on one thing at a time. If we stay focused on the task at hand and not bring in outside issues, we may resolve the conflict more easily.

“In our Al-Anon groups we discover...how much we have in common with people who seem very different from ourselves.”⁶

1. How do we keep the focus on what we have in common, rather than our differences?
2. When engaged in conflict, do I act from a place of fear?
3. How does my past experience with conflict influence how I deal with it today?

⁶ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 156

Tradition Four

Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.

Leader introduction: Freedom with limits is achieved when autonomy and responsibility are balanced. This is very helpful in the midst of conflict. This Tradition helps me to determine, within my groups and in my personal life, what my business is and what is not. When I am in someone else's business, conflict is inevitable. Autonomy gives us and our loved ones, the freedom to make our own mistakes and learn from them.

“When we catch ourselves insisting too loudly or too determinedly for one or the other, we step back and consider if we are trying to control the group. On the other hand, if we ignore the discomfort we feel when our group seems to wander too far from the Traditions, we ask ourselves if we are seeking peace at any price as we may have done in our alcoholic homes.”⁷

“Tradition Four keeps Al-Anon flexible, yet strong. Learning to act autonomously while keeping an eye out for harmony with others is a vital skill. As we practice using it in our Al-Anon groups, taking it up through each level of the fellowship, we discover what a useful principle it is in all areas of our lives. We learn the importance of being our individual selves, but don't need to impose our perceptions on everyone else...”⁸

1. How do we ensure harmony in our groups while encouraging divergent points of view?
2. How can we discern when someone is expressing an opinion as opposed to trying to control the outcome?
3. Have I really listened to the other point of view and considered the possibility that it may be as valid as my own?

⁷ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 165

⁸ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 166

Tradition Five

Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.

Leader introduction: Our primary purpose is to practice the Steps, offer encouragement and comfort to others affected by the family disease. We learn to keep the focus on ourselves and our Steps. We become wary of being overly helpful. In the past, our help sometimes turned into control as we focused on our sick relatives and got sicker ourselves. This Tradition guides us to develop compassion for others and keep the focus on working our own recovery program.

“Though many of us come to Al-Anon to help an alcoholic, we often arrive filled with anger, disappointment and resentment. To extend compassion to the person who is the reason for our membership in Al-Anon requires us to refer again and again to our own practice of the Twelve Steps.”⁹

“We learn the meaning of kindness and the value of non-judgmental listening from those who gave it to us.”¹⁰

1. How can I show the people I’m in conflict with that I value their opinion even though we disagree?
2. How do I use the Steps when I’m in conflict with others?
3. How can I put my recovery first when I’m engaged in conflict? In what way does blame fuel conflict?

⁹ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 175

¹⁰ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 177

Tradition Six

Our Al-Anon Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always cooperate with Alcoholics Anonymous.

Leader introduction: "By keeping a spiritual focus, we are able to provide maximum access to Al-Anon with minimum diversion from our own recovery." ¹¹ We should have our own identity, but also cooperate with others. This is the opposite of isolation. Keeping our spiritual focus in mind while in conflict will help us keep our perspective.

"I no longer have to be overly supportive of anyone else – spiritually, emotionally, physically or financially. I've learned to give people the dignity to be themselves and to discover certain things on their own."¹²

I learned the difference between cooperation and affiliation – working together vs. close association/union. "It implies working together with some give and take on each side for our mutual benefit."¹³

1. How can we work together for the common good and still maintain our individuality?
2. How have problems of money, property and prestige caused conflict in my Al-Anon groups/districts/Area?
3. What is our primary spiritual aim?

¹¹ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 184

¹² Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 189

¹³ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 189

Tradition Seven

Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Leader introduction: Perhaps finances engenders more conflict in groups and at home than any other topic. Our backgrounds seem to prime us for issues around money. We all have ideas for the best use of group funds and have trouble listening with an open mind to the opinions of others on this sensitive topic. However this Tradition does not only speak to financial support. It also addresses support to keep the groups functioning. Tradition Seven continues the principles of independence and freedom along with responsibility.

“Tradition Seven keeps us self-sustaining.”¹⁴ In a way, this sums up the whole program. I am responsible for myself – for sustaining myself and expressing my feelings and asking for what I need. I can’t expect other people to meet all of my needs or to read my mind and give me what I want without having to ask for it. That’s what many of us did before we came to Al-Anon.

“Usually when we speak of being self-supporting, we think about money. Money is only part of the story...I don’t have to adopt the moods or attitudes of those around me. If someone else is angry, I don’t need to be angry, sad or fearful. My moods and attitudes are something that only I can control. Just as I learned in Step One that I cannot control anyone else, neither can someone else control me— unless I give them the power to do so.”¹⁵

1. How can I overcome my fear of the lack of money, and trust in a Higher Power?
2. What does being self-supporting mean to me personally?
3. How would outside contributions create conflict in Al-Anon?

¹⁴ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 196

¹⁵ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 198

Tradition Eight

Al-Anon Twelfth-Step work should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

Leader introduction: We are nonprofessional and do not give advice. We share our personal experience and what has worked for us. Advice giving can fuel conflict. This Tradition guides us on how to carry the message of Al-Anon. When I'm in conflict, it can be helpful to examine how I am carrying my message.

Sometimes we need to ask for help. Conflict is easier to resolve when everyone is involved in finding a solution. I need to ask others and my Higher Power for help when I'm feeling overwhelmed. Sometimes the best solution is letting go or trying something different, even if we are not sure it's the "right" thing to do.

Practical solutions like the balance in this Tradition between volunteer work and paid staff are useful. I must do my own inventory and look again at my motives. In balance, I recognize that I cannot do it all. Experience shows that when I try, I get resentful. Trying to do it all may contribute to conflict in my relationships.

1. How does the way I communicate fuel conflict? Does my tone of voice play a part?
2. How do expectations affect conflicts, in my experience?
3. What role do I ask my Higher Power to play in the conflicts in my life?

Tradition Nine

Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

Leader introduction: We are a fellowship of equals. No one has authority over others in Al-Anon, but we do have trusted servants. We keep our structure simple and rotate responsibilities. When conflict arises, it would be easier to appeal to a higher authority to tell us what is "right" and what is "wrong." In Al-Anon, we have to reason things out ourselves and decide what is best in our particular situation. If we make a decision in our groups that ends up not working out, we can change it. We have the freedom to make mistakes and to change our minds.

"We are a fellowship, not an organization. All of the members of our fellowship are treated as equals. Organization implies power or authority over others. In Al-Anon each member is equal and everyone serves the group as a trusted servant."¹⁶

"It is not good for anyone person to monopolize one or more responsibilities. In service, we begin to learn to delegate responsibility to others. This is important because it helps us to get over our characteristic of feeling that 'only I can do everything.'"¹⁷

1. How could trying to "organize" Al-Anon cause conflict?
2. When in conflict, what can we do to remember that we share as equals in Al-Anon?
3. In conflict, the loudest voice is often the only one heard. What can be done to help draw out the quieter voices?

¹⁶ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 216

¹⁷ Paths To Recovery (B-24), page 216

Tradition Ten

The Al-Anon Family Groups have no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Leader introduction: Unity and focus on our primary purpose are the main themes of this Tradition. By Al-Anon as a group not holding opinions on various issues we can be a more inclusive fellowship. This also reminds us to keep the focus on our own program and not get involved in distractions.

“The spiritual principle underlying [Tradition Ten] is ‘Live and Let Live.’”¹⁸ Even when we are being criticized, Tradition Ten guides us not to respond to every accusation, as this could result in escalating the conflict further.

“Coming from homes affected by alcoholism, many of us have a great fear of conflict. Practicing the Traditions among ourselves helps us learn how to work through disagreements to a mutually satisfying solution, as well as how to stay out of situations that are not our business. Conflict is minimized when we focus on our common problems and solutions and avoid divisive struggles over outside issues. This reinforces our primary purpose and gives us time to take care of ourselves.”¹⁹

1. How can outside issues distract us and cause conflict?
2. How does conflict endanger unity in our groups or our families?
3. In the middle of a conflict, how can we focus on our common purpose and not on our differences?

¹⁸ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 220

¹⁹ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 222

Tradition Eleven

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members.

Leader introduction: Having come to Al-Anon and found some recovery and serenity, we often feel this program could benefit everyone we know. Perhaps it could. "The problem is that those who need it don't always want it. We can share our experience, strength and hope with them and be a good example of Al-Anon recovery..."²⁰ In conflict, we can apply the same principle of modeling the behavior we would like to see, instead of telling others what to do.

Defining the difference between attraction and promotion is not always easy. Many of us were fearful when we came to Al-Anon. Many of us remain fearful of conflict. We start to feel peace and serenity in meetings and then we experience some conflict. Our groups offer us the chance to learn to handle conflict differently from how we did in the past.

Practicing Tradition Eleven, we learn to communicate with honesty and humility.

1. How can I use the principle of "attraction rather than promotion" when I'm in conflict?
2. How does acting as though my ideas are more important than others' contribute to conflict?
3. How can we create new ways to deal with conflict that are different from how we did it before Al-Anon?

²⁰ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 227

Tradition Twelve

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

Leader introduction: "It is in learning about Tradition Twelve that we learn the spiritual guidance anonymity offers, its intent and how we can humbly apply the program to our daily lives." ²¹ After a decision is made, anonymity means that we report on the discussion that was had, all the points that were considered, and the outcome. We don't disclose who held which opinions, as that doesn't matter. Principles over personalities is a theme that could well be applied to conflict.

"There are many significant spiritual concepts embodied in the practice of anonymity. Among them are safety and respect for our fellow members, humility and the willingness to trust a Power greater than ourselves, acceptance of each other, and the willingness to live by principles we value rather than always reacting to the personalities of those around us. Anonymity unifies our fellowship by removing individual status so we can listen to the message rather than the messenger." ²²

"Our recovery and the health of our groups is assured when we place principles above personalities. Many a squabble over who is right can be avoided by focusing on principles. Even if we argue about what they mean, placing principles above personalities helps us reconnect after we have had a big discussion." ²³

1. What does "presume goodwill" mean? How would my actions change if I were to presume everyone involved was trying to do their very best?
2. How do I detach from personalities and focus on principles?
3. Am I able to listen to others with an open mind, or am I discounting them because they are not in agreement with me?

²¹ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 235

²² Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 236-237

²³ Paths To Recovery (B-24), pages 237