

**AVOIDING
FOUR
DESTRUCTIVE
FORCES**



**FAMILIES
ANONYMOUS**

AVOIDING FOUR DESTRUCTIVE FORCES

To enable our meetings to be truly constructive, it is necessary to recognise and repress Four Destructive Forces that can cause dissention and eventually destroy the group.

THE FIRST DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IS THE DISCUSSION OF ANY RELIGION.

Our programme is open to all, regardless of our various beliefs – or lack of belief. Each member's understanding of a Higher Power is strictly a personal, private choice.

Is Families Anonymous a religious programme?

FA is *not* a religious programme, although it is based upon spiritual principles. Attempts to turn the meeting into a religious observance distort its purpose. However, on a personal level, the programme can be tailor-made to meet each member's needs. We are each free, in private, to give as much or as little of a spiritual dimension to the programme as we like.

What prayers can be used at a meeting?

The use of *any* prayer is optional. The suggested Meeting Format provides two instances in the meeting structure for this purpose: one is a moment of silence; the other is at the end of the meeting where the Serenity Prayer is used for closure. The Serenity Prayer is a specific prayer commonly used in our fellowship and is acceptable to almost any member. Since all groups are autonomous, the use of any other prayer should be a decision by group conscience, bearing in mind that the choice should not offend *any* member or disregard our Traditions.

Suppose someone doesn't believe in God?

The First Destructive force states that *lack of belief* is no bar to membership. Step Three suggests *turning our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him*. Either temporarily or permanently, a member's Higher Power might be the power of the universe, nature, the loving compassion of the group itself or the God spoken of in our literature, as expressed in Step Three and Tradition Two. The idea is to gain strength to accomplish *the difficult* by turning for help to something greater and more powerful than ourselves.

RELATED RESOURCES FOR STUDY

1. *Today a Better Way* – TABW Index: “God as I understand Him”
2. TABW Index: Higher Power (bold type page numbers)
3. TABW Index: Step Three (bold type page numbers)
4. *The Twelve Steps*: Step Three

THE SECOND DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IS THE DANGER OF GOSSIP.

We are here to share our feelings, attitudes and reactions to our situation – to help us in applying the principles of Families Anonymous to our own lives. Careless discussion of other people's difficulties is contrary to the principles of our programme. What we say here – stays here!

How do we avoid careless discussion about others?

It is important for FA members to remember this principle: in Families Anonymous we tell our own stories, not those of our spouses, our children, our friends or other members. Of course, in relating our own experiences, at times we may need to share details of another person's story as it ties in with our problems, feelings, attitudes and actions. Nevertheless, working the programme means placing the emphasis on ourselves

Suppose newer members retell endless details about someone else's problems?

The sharing time provided at the end of the meeting is intended to give newcomers and those who have not spoken a chance to release their pent-up feelings and ask questions. We need to remember how we felt at our first few meetings. The opportunity to release thoughts and feelings in a group setting, without feeling judged, questioned, advised or lectured to, can be a great incentive to these newer members to 'keep coming back'.

How can we encourage any member to avoid gossip?

We all can make a conscious effort to tactfully keep the discussion on the meeting topic. Each of us can demonstrate appropriate sharing of our own personal progress, shortcomings or reactions to our situation – as they relate to the topic under discussion.

It is not uncommon for members to recognise and diplomatically call attention to this destructive force in an effort to guide the discussion back to the topic. Even some longtime members occasionally need reminding. When we demonstrate appropriate examples of sharing and thoughtful listening, we are observing Tradition One (personal progress through unity) and avoiding the Third Destructive Force (dominance). Those listening will soon grasp what *sharing*, as opposed to gossip, means in our programme. Simply put, *unity* in FA will be accomplished by working together on this principle of the programme.

RELATED RESOURCE FOR STUDY

TABW Index: Gossip

THE THIRD DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IS DOMINANCE.

Our programme is based on suggestion, interchange of experience and rotation of leaders. No member should direct, assume authority or give advice. Our leaders are chosen not to govern but to serve.

Should we ever try to act as counsellors?

Any assistance we offer should be confined to sharing our personal experience, strength and hope and never giving specific advice. Instead, members often share a number of ideas for consideration, as they relate their own experiences of what has worked (or not worked) for them.

The temptation to *play therapist* by attempting to analyse another member's feelings and actions must be avoided. If we can convey our hunches by sharing personal experiences and allowing others to draw their own conclusions – that's great. Otherwise, taking another person's inventory is likely to cause people to feel defensive, discourage honesty and limit the primary tool of our programme – the meeting. It is important to remember that empathy and identification with another member's feelings or circumstances is what makes our FA programme work.

Why do longtime members 'keep coming back'?

If we all stopped attending meetings as soon as our personal situation seemed to be resolved, our groups would not be able to survive. Yet longtime members do keep coming back for some or all of the reasons described here. Some may feel a special connection to FA and a spirit of gratitude to the programme and their group for the help they have received. Others return for reinforcement, having learned to apply the principles of Families Anonymous to their everyday problems of living. Many of us are well aware that we really can't keep what we have unless we give it

away; so we return to support the group that it may continue for those yet to find FA. Most members may recognise the weekly meeting as a ‘tune-up’ that helps them grow and stay in recovery, maintaining their serenity and spirituality.

As new members become longtimers, they too will experience the *gift of gratitude* as they share their stories and help others. This is the power of the Twelve Steps and the FA fellowship working in its members.

RELATED RESOURCE FOR STUDY

TABW Index: ‘Change – Me’

THE FOURTH DESTRUCTIVE FORCE IS DWELLING ON THE PAST.

Harbouring painful thoughts and speaking endlessly about hurtful times with our loved ones block our recovery. Besides being detrimental to our personal progress, continuous behaviour of this type within the meeting, week after week, is destructive to the group’s progress and unity. Such behaviour can lead us back to the Third Destructive Force which is dominance. Instead, we let go of the past by listening to other members, reading our FA literature and learning new ways to change our actions and attitudes, thereby improving our lives.

What should the group do if a new member does keep bringing up the past?

Newer members may need an opportunity to release their pent-up feelings of hurt, anger, betrayal and resentment. Clearing one’s mind helps prepare for healthy thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. Venting one’s feelings is perfectly understandable at one’s first two to four meetings, when one finally chooses to speak. After that, a new member (or any member), locked in the throes of painful past experiences should be encouraged to seek a Sponsor to privately work on *letting go of the past*.

What happens if the group is easy-going and doesn't mind if any member repeatedly brings up the past, even to the point of dominance? (The *Third Destructive Force*)

If members are allowed to use precious meeting time to dwell on the past, week after week, they will become *stuck* in that past, making their recovery more than difficult. This affects other members who have a need to share as they work their programme of recovery. It may also give newcomers the wrong impression of an FA meeting.

In these circumstances, a member of the group, such as the leader or the secretary, can read Tradition One aloud to help move the group back on track. Tradition One tells us that 'our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity'. If this Tradition, or any other, is disregarded, the health and effectiveness of the group will suffer.

Sometimes it is helpful if the group asks a member who is knowledgeable about the Traditions to speak privately to the unknowing member and explain the importance of tradition One in maintaining group units. The objective is to provide the member with information and persuade him or her to accept the idea of recovery through personal growth and change. this is a vital goal in all FA groups, for the sake of all members, present and future.

Each group is important to the overall good of the entire fellowship. *We can change ourselves and recover!*

RELATED RESOURCE FOR STUDY

TABW Index: Fourth Destructive Force

THE CHALLENGE TO GROUPS

Work diligently to prevent and eliminate the Four Destructive Forces in your meetings!

Avoiding any problems of **religion, gossip, dominance** and **dwelling on the past** is not as easy as it may seem. Overcoming any Destructive Force that can destroy the group is a challenge to set aside old ways and attitudes, for our personal growth and the good of the group.

Avoiding reference to religious affiliations and the use of religious terms will put people at ease in the group and avoid digression from the topic under discussion.

Curtailing the human trait of relating what is happening to others is difficult; names, places, beliefs and experiences of others have a habit of rolling off our tongues unintentionally. Information about anyone else has no relevance to our situations or to the specific topic at a meeting, unless it is part of our own actions.

Members providing professional or administrative services in their private lives may find it difficult to separate themselves from this mode of thinking in order to learn new attitudes and behaviour. These members may lead meetings frequently because they do it well or no one else wishes to take the initiative. Gently emphasising how the group will benefit from this shared service may encourage other members to lead as well as participate in discussions.

Explaining Sponsorship and maintaining a list of available sponsors will provide support for those who are 'caught in the past'. Keeping the telephone list up-to-date will also help members who just need to hear the friendly voice of another member who understands and listens.

The reward for Avoiding **Four Destructive Forces** is that the group is able to function more smoothly with everyone feeling safe, comfortable and able to contribute. Members who are conscious of the importance of *unity* will catch themselves before saying or doing something that is discouraged by the *Four Destructive Forces* or the *Twelve Traditions*. Healthy groups, in turn, encourage personal recovery among their members. This is our goal in FA!

RESOURCES FOR STUDY

Today a Better Way
The Twelve Steps
The Twelve Traditions

FAMILIES ANONYMOUS
The Doddington and Rollo Community Association
Charlotte Despard Avenue
London SW11 5HD

**For information about FA
and an FA Group near you**

Telephone
0207 498 4680

or

Email: office@famanon.org.uk

or log on to
www.famanon.org.uk

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