

Crosstalk Workshop

Families Anonymous UK

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Purpose – to raise awareness of Crosstalk, share ideas and learn together, as we don't have much about it in FA.

The label 'Crosstalk' doesn't describe 'what's in the tin' hence the need to probe deeper into what it means.

FA definition:

Within the meeting, we try to avoid Crosstalk, which is defined as:

- Speaking without being recognized by the leader
- Carrying on a separate, one-on-one, side discussion during the meeting
- Asking questions and giving feedback or advice to another member

Feedback in the meeting:

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- Talking over people
 - Chatting when people are sharing
 - People chipping in before the share finishes
 - Interrupting shares
 - Giving uninvited feedback
 - Not allowing enough space for everyone to share (when some have long or repeated shares)
 - Head nodding, laughing, other non-verbal responses—which suggest validation
 - Passing tissues – gives an implicit message to stop crying and puts a judgement on an emotion
 - When someone is expressing emotion, the person feeding back takes on the role of rescuer which puts the sharer into the role of victim.
 - Giving advice
 - Asking questions about what's been shared – asking for more details and explanation. This can lead to further feedback
 - Referring to a person by name
 - Any reaction is a distraction – anything other than silence blocks or dilutes the share
 - Interrupting the silence of the safe space – some people are uncomfortable with silence
 - Feedback expresses a judgement, and suggests a share requires validation. We get this all the time in the outside world from friends/relatives. In FA it is a joy not to have it.
 - Silence after a share is the sharer's space. The sharer needs to just exist with their share. It is powerful, and necessary to hear oneself share; and for others to absorb what was shared. This process can be ruined by feedback; it's an invasion to interrupt it.
 - When someone shares they can be in a spiritual zone and when someone interrupts they feel blocked.

"In speaking my thoughts come to me, and if someone interrupts or gives feedback then I think about what they say and not what I said."

- Giving physical comfort e.g. arm touching, handing tissues at a F2F meeting. Is that OK or not?
- Sending emojis in a Zoom meeting is the equivalent. Is that OK or not?

Why do we Crosstalk?

- Because we feel another member's pain and we want to show them.
- We're affected by the same thing, and we want to let them know.
- We want to let them know there is recovery, how FA helps, how far we've come.
- We want to offer reassurance, but that assumes we know what they need. The person needs to find their own way.
- We do it because we are empathetic caring people.
- If we avoid Crosstalk, it doesn't mean we don't care or can't talk about it afterwards.
- We don't like to offend when chatting takes place because we're basically nice people.

WhatsApp groups

- What is the WhatsApp group for?
- The group needs to discuss and define the policy, preferably before setting up the group.
- Some groups have 2 WA groups – one for business and the other for chit-chat and helpful quotes etc.
- WA needs boundaries. Guidelines to be agreed by the group. Should have one admin. Can be a rotating role.
- Who is on the group?
- How do people get added?
- Not everyone in the meeting may be on WA.
- Some WA groups can cover more than one group.
- What is its purpose?
- Is the purpose being adhered to or is it being used for something else?
- What is appropriate content?
- Is it for sharing or updates on your addict?
- Is it for uplifting quotes?
- What if someone posts views on politics?
- Is it a friendship group?
- What is appropriate membership?
- When is the chit-chat inappropriate? Does it matter?
- Does the familiarity of the group substitute for working the program and attending meetings?
- The best place to be is at an FA meeting, not on the sideline in WA.
- We need to risk offending people in order to keep the WA group relevant and safe.
- Why do we hang on to people who don't participate? Is it because we think we know what they need?
- What about people who haven't come to meetings for ages? Is a WA group the best place for recovery?
- If you take people off (after persistent non-attendance) they always have the helpline for their recovery. They can come back on if they need to.

- A group could do a reviewing exercise every so often. (6 months?)
- WA group could give people support even if they do come to meetings. The other side of that is if they're not working the program and they're not putting anything in.
- Why are we reluctant to leave WA groups we don't contribute to? Remember the spiritual principle of minding our own business.

One-on-one side discussion

- In a F2F this could be a husband/wife speaking for one another.
- Could it sound like rescuing?
- What can we do about it when a couple speak for each other? We want it to be nice, how do you tell people without upsetting them?
- Couples do banter however, it's the extent to which it affects the meeting that is important.
- We need to make sure each person has their space, and the group stays healthy.
- The meeting needs to see each person in the couple as an individual.
- When we share it should be about 'me,' and I can only speak about how someone else's behaviour is impacting ME.
- It doesn't help the newcomer to hear my opinions of how someone else is coping.
- Shares are personal, even when in a meeting as a couple, I can only speak for myself. If I speak about someone else I'm making a judgement, and so another member may think, THEY may be judged if they speak. If we share from our own experience honestly, that encourages others to share.
- In a Zoom meeting it could be members sending private messages. How does this affect the meeting? Is it ever OK?

Conclusion

- How do we decide what Crosstalk is in a meeting?
- What is acceptable/appropriate?
- With a small group, it doesn't seem so bad to allow one-on-one chat, it feels more personal. It would be worse in a large group possibly.
- Q. Is there a minimum number for Crosstalk to be a problem?
- A. The answer was, 2 people. Even a small group can suffer with too much Crosstalk.
- The 12 Step program is unique, and the leader should explain the 12-Step program is sacred. This is so different from most communications with people outside the fellowship.
- We need to practice the 12 steps.
- Who is responsible? Is it always the leader? It's best if it's the leader, but good to have a backup if the leader is new or weak.
- How does a group decide?
- How do we handle damaging Crosstalk? If it's a persistent problem, how do you address it? Conscience meeting? Study of Tradition 1?
- What about newcomers who haven't 'got it' yet? Why are we so scared to call it out and risk offending people?
- There should be a united FA mindset.
- Each group has autonomy to decide what constitutes Crosstalk, and the autonomy to change things. It's not for other groups to decide how another group should be.

- Can we have more guidance from The Board and office – more literature?
- Should we have more words describing Crosstalk in the meeting format?
- Does FA need more detail in the meeting format? A whole reading like 4 Destructive Forces? It could be a 5th Destructive Force, or a separate reading on Crosstalk, or a separate piece of literature.
- Avoiding Crosstalk may feel weird at first, but it's safe. After a while it doesn't feel weird any more.
- The meeting needs to emphasize what the format is early on, so that newcomers learn.
- The quality of the share is palpable when the meeting is followed properly.
- I like the silence to process things.

Other fellowships:

CoDA – is much stronger on Crosstalk. They have a reading at every meeting, and a whole book called out at a meeting. They use PowerPoint to share the info so that it is remembered.

<https://codauk.org/sharing/>

Al-Anon preamble: *"Crosstalk violates the safety of the meeting by recreating the family experience of not being heard, being ridiculed or belittled."*

"In general, there was unanimity in everyone's commitment to Al-Anon principles even though there was disagreement about the term crosstalk. It could be that the problem lies in the word itself, which has its origins in the world of psychotherapy rather than in Al-Anon literature and tradition. Perhaps Al-Anon members would be better able to focus on Al-Anon principles by avoiding the use of the term crosstalk, which inserts its own divisive 'personality' in a place where it appears that everyone who wrote would prefer unity around our common purposes and principles."

<https://www.alanon.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Service-Tool-6-Crosstalk-LovingInterchange-1.pdf>