



INAPPROPRIATE AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

In dealing with the addiction of a family member or friend, we may have experienced inappropriate behavior. We have learned through our meetings we no longer have to accept inappropriate behavior, threats, or intimidation; this is especially true in our rooms. A Nar-Anon meeting should always be a safe place for its members. Tradition One reminds us "*Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity.*" A group cannot have unity if the meetings are disruptive or members are not comfortable sharing.

What might make a member feel uncomfortable or perhaps even unsafe?

Crosstalk

Crosstalk can be one of the most disruptive behaviors that can occur in meetings. When allowed to continue, it can destroy a meeting. Sometimes, when in chaos, a member might feel they need more attention, forgetting what they have learned. Loving reminders can be shared in a way that do not call people out or embarrass them, but allows the meeting to get back on track. Leading by example can be more effective than criticism.

While attending my home group, a longtime member was sharing about a particularly challenging event. When others shared on how they approached such challenges, the original member would address each one and soon began interrupting shares. I raised my hand to share and simply said, "When I have a difficult situation and ask the group to share on how they might have handled it, it is important that I sit and listen." This is one of the reasons we ask there be no crosstalk. It not only allows others to share uninterrupted, it allows me to concentrate on the message others may be delivering that I need to hear.

Breaking a Member's Anonymity

If a member hears something they have shared repeated or their name is used without their permission, they may not be able to trust other members. If this happens, it should be addressed immediately. By being diligent in practicing anonymity, we help everyone maintain a comfort level we can find nowhere else.

Anonymity is a cornerstone of our program and provides us with the comfort of knowing what we say in a meeting will stay in the meeting. Our rooms are safe places because we practice anonymity before, during, and after our meetings. We come to this fellowship for many reasons, all of them personal. Some of us do not want anyone to know we are attending Nar-Anon, and some may fear the reactions of others for attending.

Once, as I arrived at the location of my home group, I overheard four members talking outside. They were discussing what I had said at a different meeting. Only one member of the group had been at that meeting. I immediately lost trust in that person and felt I could not share in front of them anymore. I wondered where else and with whom they had shared what I said.

Religious Discussions

Our program is not religious, but spiritual. Sharing what we did in church or what a particular denomination says we should do may make others feel isolated. Some of us may have come to the rooms of Nar-Anon without belief in a Higher Power. When sharing becomes a religious discussion, it diverts us from our primary purpose and might make others feel uncomfortable.

A member in a meeting I attended regularly liked to use excerpts from the Bible. He went as far as reading a passage and giving the chapter and verse. When I spoke to him about it, his response was "I don't understand why I can't read from the Bible since SESH has quotes from the Bible." I explained that while what he said was true, any quotes in SESH were conference approved, and we only read from conference approved literature (CAL) in our meetings. When it became apparent after I spoke with him again about religious discussions that he would continue, I chose not to attend when he was chairing.

Inappropriate Sharing

The Guide to Local Services sample meeting format suggests we share only as a member of Nar-Anon unless invited as a speaker from NA, keeping in mind some NA members also belong to our fellowship and can share as such. We welcome anyone whose life has been affected by the addiction of a relative or friend, including NA members. When someone attends our meeting and shares as a member of NA, discussing their struggle with addiction, our own members may feel uncomfortable. They may feel they cannot share honestly about the chaos that takes over their lives because of an addict's behavior or actions. They may feel their sharing could be offensive to an addict. Our meetings may be the only place a member can feel comfortable sharing how another's addiction has affected their life. When we share only as members of Nar-Anon, we preserve that safe atmosphere.

Interrupting, crosstalk, or giving advice may be offensive to other members. Members may feel isolated because they don't identify with the messages being shared. We need to recognize addiction is addiction, whether it is a spouse, a child, or a friend. No scenario is easier or more difficult. The struggles may be different in nature but are the same in the impact they have on the lives of the people involved. All members can identify with the message of Nar-Anon, and our meetings should remain focused on that message.

An NA member attending a Nar-Anon meeting spoke out that they were offended when someone shared their unhappiness with the behavior of an addict and their own reaction to it. The GSR spoke to the NA member after the meeting and explained when we share in our meetings, we are looking for help and support in behaviors we wish to change. Nar-Anon members understand that the focus is on us and our reactions, not the circumstance that caused the reaction. While that member chose not to return, our meeting room remained a safe place for our members to share and look for help.

Taking Pictures

No matter what a member's intent may be for taking pictures during a meeting, no one wants their image to leave the room. If this happens, the member taking pictures should be asked to stop and delete any images already taken.

A few years ago in my home group, a visitor was taking pictures with a cell phone. When a member noticed and asked him to stop, he denied taking pictures. He wouldn't show the group and left shortly after. We could not take the phone from him and had no way of knowing why he had taken them. The group was very uncomfortable and felt their safety and anonymity had been compromised.

Recording a Meeting or Taking Copious Notes

A meeting should never be recorded unless permission has been granted by everyone present. If someone becomes aware of a recording, the member should immediately be asked to stop and delete anything that has been recorded. There are times, especially for the new member, they wish to take notes, so they don't forget anything they hear; however, when a member takes continuous notes from the time the meeting starts until it ends, other members can become uncomfortable.

One meeting I attended had a member who took notes constantly throughout the meeting. It appeared the member was recording everything said on paper. I spoke to her after we closed one evening and simply said, "I noticed you take a lot of notes." She told me she was afraid she would forget something that was said. She

asked me if it was ok to do that. I shared my feeling that taking notes during the whole meeting can make others feel uncomfortable, but, just as important, a person cannot listen fully while busily writing. It is by listening that we learn how others handle the challenges we face. I shared how often I find that just when I need it, I will remember what someone shared in a meeting, even if it was years earlier. It seemed to put her mind at ease. While she still took some notes, she spent more time listening than note taking.

Sexual Advances

Suggestive language or inappropriate touching towards another member should be brought to the group's attention and addressed promptly.

We had a situation in a group I attend where a male member was using suggestive language toward our female members. This happened outside, after the meeting. We lost some female members because they felt uncomfortable in the room. Several members confronted him after a meeting regarding this behavior. When one of the female members told us he had done it again, we decided we needed to address the situation. We took a group conscience and agreed that he would no longer be welcome in the meeting. We contacted him to let him know of the group's decision. He chose to ignore this and returned the next week. He became agitated, verbally abusive, and threatening. We called law enforcement and had him removed. The group service representative made the region aware of the situation and the steps taken in case any problems occurred later.

Violent Versus Passionate Outbursts

Dealing with addiction can bring up angry feelings. Many of us may have felt victimized by another person's anger. Angry outbursts during sharing, even if not directed at us, can be frightening. Our meetings are dynamic events. There are times a member has had a particularly difficult event happen before the meeting, and they want to discuss it. Some of us will speak calmly and rationally, others may be upset and cry, still others may be more vocal and loudly let it all out at once. At these times, there may be some profanity or hand gestures. This is most often just passionate discourse, but we must be aware of the times this can be a violent tirade and action should be taken. Respect for the group is paramount at our meetings. When a member becomes violent, members do not feel safe and may choose not to return. When violent speech or actions begin, someone should try to convince the offending member to leave the room with another member for a few minutes to calm down. Most of the time, this will defuse the situation. If the conduct continues to repeat itself, the member may be asked to stop attending the meeting and move on to another group.

Our meeting had a situation when an occasional member rudely interrupted a fairly new member who was sharing, using the name of a magazine. The person sharing was embarrassed and stopped coming. We held a group conscience and discussed the meeting format. We decided to add that if a member has a problem with something being shared, they should discuss it with the GSR in private after the meeting. We held a few meetings on the topics of crosstalk, conference approved literature, and appropriate sharing. A few months later, the same member became verbally abusive because they felt it was not in keeping with traditions to go around the room and share. When asked to step outside to discuss the situation, they stated they would interrupt any time they felt it necessary. Due to the severity of the situation, the GSR asked the abusive member to step into the hall to discuss it. The member refused and left. After a group conscience, it was decided to ask the member not to come back. The group felt they would feel uncomfortable sharing when they were afraid they would be verbally attacked. The member who was asked not to return attends several other meetings in the area.

Each situation may need to be handled in a different way. Having a discussion during a business meeting about how to handle situations should they arise can be helpful. Another suggestion is to have a recovery meeting focused on inappropriate behavior and how it affects the individual and the group.

For related reading, see ***S-308 Appropriate Sharing & Crosstalk*** and ***S-307 Let's Talk About Anonymity***.