

First Things First

Newsletter of the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

No rules in A.A., but ‘cross-talk’ discouraged at many meetings



Awareness is key: One member’s take

By Carol C.

When I attend any Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, I enter the hall with the presumption that I will be safe there and that my anonymity is protected. I can share my experience, strength, and hope, as well as “burning desires” (which to me mean anything going on in my head that might break my abstinence or lead to harmful behaviors), confident that the principles of anonymity and our Traditions will keep me safe.

When I need guidance or advice, I talk to my sponsor. One-on-one conversations are not appropriate in any meeting, open or closed, once the meeting begins. “Discussion” is sharing experience on the topic introduced, not discussing the person who brought it up or offering advice to them either directly or in the guise of “sharing” to the group. In other words, cross-talking. [See ‘Awareness’ on page 2](#)

What is ‘cross-talk’?

It means different things to different people, but generally speaking, cross-talk is sharing that might be intrusive or disruptive.

Engaging directly in conversation with another alcoholic during their share is usually considered crosstalk. Giving someone advice, or giving feedback about someone else’s share, can also be considered crosstalk.

A.A.’s General Service Office doesn’t have a policy about crosstalk. Groups decide for themselves what boundaries should be.

Here are a couple different takes on crosstalk, as printed in the Spring 2017 issue of **Box 459**, the General Service Office’s quarterly newsletter.

The Washington Heights Group in Upper Manhattan has a statement, born of the group conscience, which is read at every Thursday evening meeting: *“Feedback and crosstalk are discouraged here. Crosstalk is giving advice to others who have already shared, speaking directly to another person rather than to the group, and questioning or interrupting the person* [See ‘cross-talk’ on Page 2](#)

'Awareness' continued from page 1

As one of the biggest offenders, I am acutely aware of this whenever I do it, or when I hear anyone else doing it! I excuse my behavior in any number of ways, like I have ADD, or I'm a mom, or I've been there and this is what I did. I want to be helpful, so when anyone shares that they are suffering or having a difficult time, I instantly want to reassure them with a touch or offer them advice. I mean well, but I am actually jeopardizing their anonymity by singling them out and perhaps, rather than reassure, I cause anxiety. Besides that, I have been around long enough to know that reliance needs to be on a Higher Power, and I am not that!

“I mean well, but I am actually jeopardizing their anonymity by singling them out and perhaps, rather than reassure, I cause anxiety.”

—Carol C.

Recently, in a meeting, I misspoke and was corrected by the next sharer who continued to speak, and I tried to defend myself while he was still talking. Two things happened. I made it impossible for him to continue to his point, causing a distraction and making his seat uncomfortable. The other thing that happened was that the room withdrew a bit and felt uncomfortable, fearful we were about to “get into it.” With just a few words in a very brief direct exchange, the safety of the room was shattered.

If we cannot feel safe in a meeting, if we feel that our anonymity is jeopardized, our program stumbles, and for some, it could be the jet fuel sending them out the door.

'Cross-talk' continued from Page 1

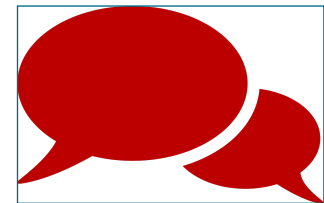
speaking at the time. If crosstalk occurs, the chair will remind you of this policy.”

Susan U., of the **79th Street Workshop in New York City**, notes that ‘crosstalk’ wasn’t even in A.A. vocabulary until the 1990s, and she cautioned against setting up too many rules and regulations in response to what – and how – people share in meetings: *“There are no rules in A.A., just customs and the conscience of each autonomous group, and experience shows that for most groups attempts to control don’t work very well. On the other hand, the nonjudgmental sharing we receive at meetings in response to something we have said can be beneficial to our recovery. It’s how we learn to live sober, productive lives, and that’s what sharing our experience and strength is about.”*

For group discussion:

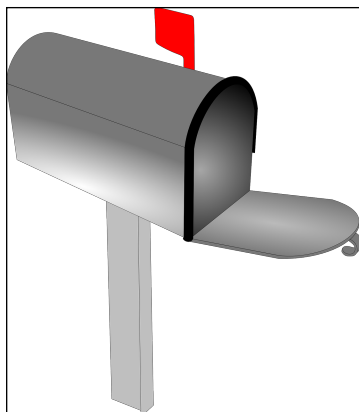
What is your home group’s conscience about cross-talk?

Does your group read a statement about cross-talk at the



start of the meeting? Let us know so we can share it!

New year, new addresses!



Western Maryland Intergroup has a new P.O. Box number starting this month. Send correspondence and contributions to:

Western Maryland Intergroup
P.O. Box 3005
Lavale, Md., 21504

Maryland General Service also has a new mailing address. Send contributions to:

Maryland General Service
P.O. Box 207
Benson, Md., 21018

AA slogans: Honesty, Open-mindedness, Willingness (H.O.W.)

What does it mean to you?

By Lora B.

My life goes well in all areas if I can maintain a mindset of honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. If I practice H.O.W. I can be free. Honesty keeps my insides clean and free of darkness. Dark thoughts and ideas can't fester and grow in the light of honesty. I don't hide from myself and my twisted thinking, if I'm honest. Honesty is an action. I don't need to be honest with everyone, but I need to practice self-honesty and honesty with my sponsor. If I don't, I'm heaping more baggage on my soul. If I truly look at myself, I lose my fear of people. I can see my darkest thoughts and experiences and not cringe, for they can be used to help another. I accept and ask my Higher Power to relieve me from this bondage.

I need to be open-minded so I can hear and process new ideas. I can't change my life if I can't hear new information. With an open mind, I set aside my old, broken ideas and habits and let in new ones. I'm easier to get along with because I'm not always saying no to everything. I feel more confident in my own skin. I lose my inflexibility. I'm open to people, not closed off and angry.



I must be willing to let the solution enter my heart. I can't say, "I'll come to A.A. and do what's asked, but then, I'm going to drink champagne at my wedding." Or, "I'll work these steps, but only for six months. After that, I'll be able to drink like other people." I must be willing to do my Higher Power's will — whatever that is. I agree. It's scary surrendering like that, but that's the way to the solution.

I feel warm and comfy and protected by my Higher Power. I feel that cozy feeling, like when a cat curls up next to you and purrs, content. If I practice these principles, my mind is at peace. No crazy thoughts. No fear. Only peace. On any given day, though, I must pray multiple times to get help seeking and doing God's will. Sometimes, I take it all back. I'm not perfect. But, if I keep practicing daily to maintain this state of mind, I find peace again. Anyone can have it. It's simple: practice honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness, the first three steps. Peace will come.

“We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open-mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable.”

—(Appendix II, “Spiritual Experience”, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 567-568)

What We Do... at Western Maryland Intergroup

- Maintain a website: www.westernmarylandaa.org and a hotline: 844-568-3422
- Create and distribute Where & When's
- Host workshops and activities, including the annual Gratitude Breakfast in April
- Provide literature to local treatment and detention centers
- Publish a monthly newsletter
- Cooperate with the professional community to increase awareness and understanding of Alcoholics Anonymous
- Provide a P.O. Box for correspondence (P.O. Box 3005, Lavale, Md., 21504).



We need you!

Every A.A. group in the area can elect a representative to Intergroup. Intergroup representatives attend monthly meetings, contribute ideas and skills, and help to form the collective group conscience for A.A. in the area.

Meetings are at **6 p.m.** the third Friday of each month at various locations in Allegany and Garrett counties. **The next meeting is Friday, Jan. 19**, at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 16 Washington St., Cumberland, Md.

Thank you for your support!

December donations

- Friendsville Step Study: \$27.00
- Kindred Spirits Women: \$30.32
- Mustard Seed (Oakland): \$50.00
- Sick and Tire: \$25.00

First Things First is published monthly by the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous.

P.O. Box 3005, Lavale, Md., 21504

Website: <https://westernmarylandaa.org>

Email: westernmarylandaa@gmail.com

24-hour Hotline: 844-568-3422, or 844-LOVE4AA

Submissions are welcome! If you have an idea or a story, send us an e-mail.

The views expressed in *First Things First* represent those of individuals and do not imply endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous.



Women reading *Emotional Sobriety II*

By Carol C. and Kristin B.

A small group of women that meets Wednesday evenings in Frostburg started reading the Grapevine book, *Emotional Sobriety II*, in December, after completing a reading of the Big Book.

Available at aagrapevine.org/store, the book includes more than 40 articles that have been published in the magazine from its inception in 1944 to present.

Written by A.A. members for A.A. members, the stories all focus on gaining emotional health after getting sober.

Kindred Spirits Women's Group meets Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. in a small conference room upstairs at First

Presbyterian Church, 33 Broadway St., Frostburg (next to the police station).

If you can manage three to four steps, there is a stair-chair to bring you the rest of the way up, if you need that assistance.

Upstairs, the conference room is warm and cozy with comfortable swivel chairs and book-lined walls. Both coffee and tea are offered on a side table.

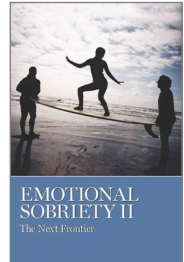
Usually around four to 10 women attend the meeting. The format is to read passages from the literature and then discuss it.

The group includes a short statement about cross-talk at the start of the meeting, asking that one person speak at a time and no conversations occur during the formal meeting. Participants are encouraged to stay after the meeting for one-on-one conversation and questions.

Five women attended on a recent Wednesday night. Shares were honest and sincere, creating an environment of trust, acceptance, and support. Carol said she was "both surprised and pleased that there was zero cross-talk, considering the modest attendance."

Grapevine, a monthly magazine, is recognized by A.A.'s General Service Conference as the International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous. The January 2024 issue, coincidentally, has a special section called "Emotional Sobriety."

Get a subscription at aagrapevine.org/store/grapevine-subscriptions, or check out the new app at the Apple Store or Google Play.



Roving Recovery



Tell us about a meeting you attend either regularly, or as an out-of-town guest for our "Roving Recovery" feature. Send it to westernmarylandaa.org.

2024
60th International Women's Conference
ONLINE!
February 8-11, 2024
Live from Portland, Maine

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS broadcast to you from Portland, Maine
ENTERTAINMENT and fellowship Friday and Saturday nights
HYBRID PANELS: Attend select panels as they happen live
EXCLUSIVE online panels & workshops for attendees
OPPORTUNITIES to be of service to other sober women

\$15 Registration

Questions? IWCPORTLAND24@GMAIL.COM

What happened at the meeting?

Western Maryland Intergroup, Dec. 15, 2023 meeting minutes

Attendance

Lora, Kristin, Farren, Wendell, Kenny, Erin, Jeff, Dan, Cody

Call to Order at 6:11 pm

Adjourned at 7:15 pm

Serenity Prayer

Traditions -

November 17, 2023 minutes approved.

Treasurer-Farren

Starting balance: +\$3187.76

Paper statement fee -1.00

Frostburg rent -\$9.00

Frostburg rent collected +\$9.00

Thursday Coffee Club, McHenry Donation +70.50

Friendsville Donation +27.00

Kindred Spirits Wms Donation +30.32

Mustard Seed Donation +50.00

Sick and Tire Donation +25.00

Ending balance: +\$3390.58

Savings Acct: \$23.02

Reserve fund: \$2190.08

Institutions: Chair - Les (Cody)

- Massie is on lockdown.
- Cody is going to Garrett.
- Marvin is going into Allegany
- Talked about spending money for jails and institutions on literature to help inmates and NY/GSO.
- Set aside \$500 for the NYE party.
- Lora will reach out to Allegany to make sure we can give the inmates literature. Do they want books or a subscription to Grapevine? Do they want soft covers, hard covers? Are staples in the books allowed?
- Cody will ask Garret.
- Farren will reach out to Les to investigate.

Activities: Chair: Kenny

- New Year's Eve party: Dan & Lora to get fried chicken and bring cornhole.
- Entertainment is covered.
- Is coming with his guitar.

- Set up is at 6pm.
- Kenny is going to ask Shane if he can donate some video games for the kids.
- Blank check for Kenny. Lora and Dan will be reimbursed next month.

Newsletter: chair - Kristin B.

- Brought extra copies of the newsletter.
- Read Lora's piece on meeting in prison.
- Erin suggested that we, Intergroup, and members of our home groups submit our anniversaries with our home groups.
- Renew the anniversary list every year. Hopefully, groups can submit their new list every year to Intergroup. Take a screenshot of the current month's anniversary.
- Wendell will submit a spiritual time keeper article for next month

Website: Chairs - Erin and Wendell

- In November, we had 130 unique visitors and 238 sessions with 501 page views.
- Wendall did not send a trouble ticket about Thursday meetings not appearing on the website. He will send a ticket this month.
- Figured out how to add editors.
- Payment info is taken care of.
- Erin updated a flyer on the website.
- Erin created the NYE flyer.
- Website renewal will be \$192 with \$11.52 tax.

CPC: Chair - Woody

- Woody did not attend.

Where & When handouts: Chair - open position

- Wendall redesigned the Where and When handouts on to legal size paper. This makes it easier to read and gives room to add new meetings.
- Everyone said it looks great!
- Change the season from fall to winter 2023 - 2024.

see *Meeting* page 7

Meeting continued from page 6

- Experiment with adding four columns instead of three.
- Kristin asked if 300 Where and When handouts is enough to print.
- Either Erin or Wendall will send a PDF of the new handout.

Literature: Chair - Les

- Les did not attend.

Hotline: Chair- Dan

- Did not call Grasshopper.
- 9 calls. 3 from the same woman.
- Get it so when the calls forward our personal numbers to the caller.
- Three calls to the hotline from the same woman who has now been sober for 25 days.

Old Business

- Looked into the EIN number. We do not have one. Lots of people said we must have an EIN number to set up a business checking account.

- More investigation into opening a Paypal or Venmo account will happen before next month.
- Restrictions on how you can pay.
- Wendall suggested asking Fort Recovery or Liberty Club to use their physical address. Dan said we would have to discuss the traditional impact.
- Kristin will write the letter about the printing bill and mail the check.
- Redid the Intergroup card so the QR code is larger.
- Farren said we need to renew our post office box. It needs to be renewed in January. The office in LaVale is open 24/7. Voted to move the PO box to LaVale.

New business

- Voted to send \$500 to the General Service Office in New York City, which sent a letter to A.A. groups last month asking for support.
- Our next meeting will be January 19, 2023 in Frostburg.

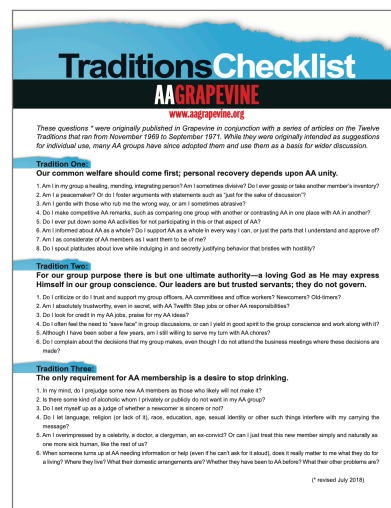
Tradition One: “Our common welfare comes first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.”

The Traditions Checklist is a tool for A.A. members and groups to take inventory of how well we know and follow A.A. Traditions. You can find it at aagrapevine.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/GVTraditions-Checklist-2018.pdf.

Tradition 1, Question 1 from Traditions Checklist: Am I in my group a healing, mending, integrating person? Am I sometimes divisive? Do I ever gossip or take another’s inventory?

I hope that most of the time I am more of a healing, integrative person than a divisive person. Generally speaking, I don’t like conflict, so my default position is to try to find solutions for problems and common ground for disparate perspectives. Do I ever gossip? Far less now than maybe when I first came into the program. In early recovery, it could sometimes feel necessary to build up my fragile ego by tearing someone else down. These days, I have a better sense of who I am in the world as a sober person. It doesn’t feel good to talk negatively about other people. Take another’s inventory? Oh, sure. All the time. Who doesn’t? But I’m aware of it, I think, and can catch myself before I go off the rails. Better to look at my own stuff than spend a lot of energy diagnosing someone else’s problems.

—Kristin B.



What do they do at the General Service Office in New York? And why do they need our money?

In November, A.A.’s General Service Office sent a letter to groups across the U.S. and Canada, sounding an alarm about finances.

Since the COVID pandemic, literature sales have declined significantly, and costs to run operations have increased across the board. While GSO has worked to reduce total operating expenses to an average of \$15,768,000 annually — compared to pre-pandemic levels of \$16,258,000 — it is still operating in the red.

Although A.A. is self-supporting through member and group contributions, sales of the literature that we publish provides a much-needed supplement.

GSO has asked the Fellowship to consider sending a special contribution, and in the months ahead to make “more frequent, and incremental contributions” to New York.

“We need your help to continue to adjust and to plan for the reality of current economic conditions and changes in our Fellowship,” GSO general manager Bob W. wrote. “As members we often say that when A.A. needs money, the Fellowship will respond. This is one of those times.”

The General Service Office, which includes A.A. World Services and *Grapevine* magazine, employs 87 people, who respond to thousands of inquiries from groups and members every year. It publishes A.A. literature, including the Big Book and 12 and 12, oversees translations of A.A. literature, and guards against copyright infringement.

That’s just a tiny glimpse of all the ways that GSO works on behalf of the Fellowship to keep us sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety. Go to aa.org to find out more.

To see the full text of GSO General Manager Bob W.’s letter, go to aa.org/sites/default/files/literature/gratitude_letter_combined_en1123.pdf

Send individual or group contributions to GSO online at aa.org, or mail to:

P.O. Box 2404
James A. Farley Station
New York, N.Y.

Baltimore Intergroup hosts
Founder’s Day

BUS TRIP TO GSO

Join us for a trip to the
General Service Office in NYC

\$60 per person

Call 410-663-1922 to sign up
LIMITED SPACE-MUST PAY TO RESERVE A SEAT

When: June 7, 2024
Time: Bus leaves 6:30am from 1000 Cromwell Bridge Rd Park N Ride, Towson, MD 21286
GSO Tour: 11am AA Meeting, 12:15pm Tour
If you wish to participate in the tour, GSO requires a list with full name for security purposes. You must also show ID when we enter the building
Return: Bus leaves NY 7pm and returns around 10pm

Bring some snacks to share, we will provide water!



GSO Bus Trip, June 7, 2024
June 7, 2024 @ 6:00 am - 10:00 pm | \$60.00

Want to get a better idea of what A.A. “general services” are? Take a bus trip to New York City and take a look for yourself!

The General Service Office welcomes visitors throughout the year, and the Baltimore Intergroup is planning a bus trip in June.

A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.’s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

1970 International Convention of Alcoholics
Anonymous in Miami, Fla.