

Appendix B

SHARING IN ACA MEETINGS, CROSS-TALK & FIXING

Sharing in Meetings

Many people arrive at ACA nervous and not knowing how to share at meetings. In the beginning, we encourage ACA members to share whatever comes up. There is no wrong way to share at an ACA meeting, as long as we are not verbally aggressive towards others or cross talking. ACA members listen with respect and hold space for one another with presence and empathy. After a while, our sharing might take on a general form of recalling our childhood experiences, and how we use re-parenting, the Steps, and other ACA tools and resources to address the effects of family dysfunction. Sharing at ACA meetings allows us to emerge from emotional isolation by breaking the rules of family dysfunction: Don't talk–Don't trust–Don't feel. As we authentically share with others, we invite deeper connections with our true selves.

Cross Talk

In ACA, the term “cross talk” means interrupting, referring to, commenting on, or using the content of what another person has said during a meeting. Cross talk also refers to any type of dialog that occurs when the meeting is in progress. Members talking to one another or discussing what someone has just said is cross talk.

Many adult children come from family backgrounds where feelings and perceptions were constantly judged—negatively or positively. For example, we may have been told that our feelings were wrong or didn't matter—or that we were weak, stupid, or needy when we spoke up. Or we may have been praised in ways that taught us to “perform” and seek approval from others with what we say. Or, we may have grown up in environments where no one listened to us at all.

In ACA, each person may share their feelings and perceptions without fear of being judged negatively or interrupted, and without being praised in ways that can reinforce approval-seeking patterns. In ACA, we speak about our own experiences and feelings; we accept without comment what others say because it is true for them. We focus on our own healing at meetings rather than giving advice or trying to “fix” others.

In ACA, we strive to create safe places for participants to open up and share. As part of creating a safe meeting, we refrain from cross talk and fixing behaviors.

Interrupting

Each member in ACA should be able to share, free from interruption. When someone is sharing, all others should refrain from speaking, including side conversations with a neighbor. Gestures, noise, or movement could also be considered interruption if it is grossly distracting.

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Referring To

In ACA, we keep the focus on our lives and our feelings. We do not refer to the shares of others except as a transition into our own sharing. A very general “what’s been brought up for me is ...” or the occasional “thank you for sharing” is fine. However, please do not make more detailed references to another person’s share.

Commenting On

In ACA, we accept what each person shares as true for them. We go to great lengths to avoid creating the climate of shame that enforced the three primary rules of family dysfunction: Don’t talk—Don’t trust—Don’t feel. In ACA, we simply do not comment positively or negatively about another person’s share during a meeting. Unsolicited advice before, during, or after a meeting can be a form of commentary and should be avoided. We can ask permission if we want to speak with someone about their share after or outside a meeting. In like manner, we never talk about the contents of another person’s share to a third party. Everything shared in an ACA meeting is considered privileged and confidential and must be treated with the utmost respect.

Fixing Others

In ACA, we do not touch, hug, or attempt to comfort others when they become emotional during an ACA meeting. If someone begins to cry or weep during a meeting, we allow them to feel their feelings. We support them by refraining from touching them or interrupting their tears with something we might say. To touch or hug the person in this way is known as “fixing.” As children, we tried to fix our parents or to control them with our behavior. In ACA, we are learning to take care of ourselves and not attempt to fix others. We support others by accepting them into our meetings and listening to them while they face their pain. We learn to hold space by listening, letting be, and trusting the process, which is often the greatest support of all.

