

What Compassion Really Means

Before coming to Al-Anon, I had a hard time understanding exactly what compassion was. I thought it meant covering for the alcoholic and making excuses for his actions. I thought I was being compassionate when I looked the other way but still fixed whatever he did that caused problems. I thought I was having compassion for him when I made myself responsible for his drinking, dishonesty, and abuse.

I was so wrong, and I was not aware that what I was doing was actually harming him. I didn't know that I was enabling him. Change was very painful for me, but through the Al-Anon program, I learned in a gentle and caring way what compassion really is.

Compassion is about accepting people as they are and still loving them. That does not mean making excuses for the alcoholic or covering for their mistakes. That is enabling. Sometimes, being compassionate requires a great deal of effort. I can find compassion for others who have tested me to the limit by letting go of resentments and anger. But I can only let go of resentments and anger if I first let go of unrealistic expectations, let others take responsibility for their actions, and allow them the dignity to learn from their own mistakes. This applies to me too.

Many times, being compassionate with myself has been a lot more difficult than being compassionate with others. I can only achieve compassion for myself by accepting myself the same way that I learned to accept others as they are, by practicing "Live and Let Live" and remembering that I don't need to be perfect. I don't need to change instantly, but I can make

progress “One Day at a Time” by going to meetings, reading Al-Anon literature, and talking to my Sponsor.

It took me years to stop enabling my son and start giving him the dignity to learn from his own mistakes, and at the same time, to accept myself the way I am. But with the guidance of the Al-Anon program, I now feel compassion for both of us, and I understand that I didn’t cause him to drink, I can’t control him or his drinking, and I cannot cure him. In a few words, Al-Anon helped me to stop enabling and start feeling compassion.

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