

Inside Al-Anon Family Groups

Phone Contacts Support the Newcomer

Growing up in the family disease of alcoholism, I developed the survival tactic of being a chameleon. Whether it was blending in with cliques at school or trying to be invisible at home, I learned very quickly that this was an effective way to avoid trouble. Unfortunately, this behavior evolved into some social anxiety.

Even in social groups that I am comfortable with, if I'm the least bit late, I find it very difficult to drum up the courage to go in. *What if they call me out for being late? What if I trip over my feet while walking through the door?* That would be humiliating, and the possible short-term reward of fun social interaction does not outweigh my anxiety about being permanently embarrassed.

At my first meeting, members suggested that I attend six meetings to determine if Al-Anon was right for me and find a group that felt comfortable, and I committed to their guidance. The next meeting I attended was held in a hospital. I remember asking the front desk for directions. What they told me seemed overwhelming, and I felt the anxiety of thinking, *I am going to get lost and show up late and what will they think of me?* I thanked the hospital volunteer and turned around to walk out the door.

As I turned, a member from the first meeting walked in and asked if I was there for the meeting. I almost said no. But then I felt the immediate reassurance of being with someone who knew where they were going. I knew I wouldn't get lost, and everything would be okay. Attending this

second meeting gave me the courage to find four others to visit before I decided to make the first meeting my home group.

When potential newcomers call the World Service Office's toll-free meeting line, oftentimes they request the contact information for the meeting near them. Each meeting has one or two members assigned to be "Phone Contacts for the Public." This service role is an opportunity to be there for the newcomer, answer their questions, meet them outside the meeting location, and even walk in with them, so they don't have to face this alone.

I am so grateful to that member for walking in when she did, because I have since been able to enjoy a life of recovery. I don't want to think about where my life would be without this program. Today, serving as the Phone Contact for my group gives me the chance to be that support for the next person coming in. I do struggle with answering a call from a phone number I don't recognize, but I remember that if I don't answer their call, they just might not walk in the door.

By Scot P., Director of Communications & Community Awareness

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