

**HOW TO HANDLE A PROBLEM DRINKER:
FROM ANGER TO ACTION**
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When she first sought therapy for depression, Amy casually mentioned that her husband had a “communication problem.” In one story after another, she described how her husband ended up passing out on the couch in the den. Amy ended up with sleepless nights embittered by her anger. “I just can’t stand it when I hear those ice cubes clinking in the glass,” she said in disgust, “because I know what it means.”

Before seeking professional help, Amy had been spending several nights a week brooding in the bedroom. Yet she agreed that there were better things in life than sitting on the bed at night, listening to the ice cubes clink. I suggested she try something new—Al-Anon Family Groups.

Within weeks, I noticed an improvement in Amy’s mood and a shift in her attitude as she began attending meetings and reading Al-Anon literature. As a psychotherapist, I knew that the path of recovery often begins with focusing on changing what can be changed, rather than focusing on what cannot be changed. Recovery involves *accepting* what cannot be changed, *changing* what can be changed, and *understanding* the difference between the two.

Like many Al-Anon members, Amy began to notice an improvement in her five senses. She noticed a *sense of universality* at her first meeting, where she learned that she was not alone in her struggle. She felt a *sense of hope* when she began attending meetings on a regular basis. She discovered a *sense of connection* as she began making telephone contacts and sharing her life with other members. She developed a *sense of accountability* by having a personal Sponsor who challenged her to “take an inventory” and focus on improving her own life rather than criticizing the life of another. She created a *sense of balance* in her life

through her increased self-awareness, acceptance, and action in her life each day—one day at a time. She gradually began to experience a transformation in herself as she learned to apply the Twelve Steps of recovery to her life.

“Amy” is not an actual person; rather, her story is a composite of the many stories of experience, strength, and hope I have heard from my clients who have entered the rooms of Al-Anon.

Going to the first meeting is something that many people find difficult. It is like overcoming a paralysis. Once a person begins attending meetings, his or her thoughts are usually still consumed by the behavior of the alcoholic. Gradually, with the support of other members who are focused on taking better care of their own lives, the newcomer begins to think about his or her own needs.

Taking care of one’s own needs does not mean that one stops loving the alcoholic. Instead, it means that one no longer allows oneself to be hurt or manipulated by someone else’s actions. As the Al-Anon member learns new attitudes and becomes stronger and healthier, shifting the focus away from taking care of the alcoholic to taking better care of oneself, the alcoholic often becomes willing to seek help.

Most importantly, Al-Anon members eventually learn that they can find peace and happiness whether or not the alcoholic is still drinking.

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