

**HOW TO UNDERSTAND AL-ANON:
ACRONYMS AND SLOGANS
William Doverspike, Ph.D.
Drdoverspike.com
770-913-0506**

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The title of this article is simply one I use in the document filing system for my articles that I post. There are no implications contained herein that this article has received—or that the author has applied for—Al-Anon Conference Approval. I make no claim that the contents, opinions, or statements expressed herein are free of error. In fact, my opinions may be wrong. I welcome any corrections, deletions, or edits in terms of any empirical or factual inaccuracies.

As a preface to understanding Al-Anon, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with Twelve Step recovery programs, it may be useful to review how Al-Anon works. The “Suggested Al-Anon Preamble to the Twelve Steps” provides this brief description that is read at the opening of almost all meetings:

“The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.

Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions.

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.”

(Al-Anon Family Groups, 2022, p. 12)

Newcomers typically think of slogans as simplistic. That is, slogans are for people who are incapable of complex thought. Others want the slogans to have commas, clauses, and contingencies. Instead, slogans are more like proverbs, which contain a few words packed with a high density of wisdom. Old-timers¹ in the program call them nuggets of wisdom.

Acronyms ²

AAA The Three As ³
 Awareness, Acceptance, Action (*Hope for Today*, Al-Anon, 2002, p. 97)

BBB The Three Bs
 Behaving, Believing, Belonging

BFO
 Blinding Flash of the Obvious

CCC The Three Cs
 I didn't cause it. I can't cure it. I can't control it.

DDD The Three Ds
 Direction Determines Destination.

DENIAL
 Don't Even kNow I Am Lying

DETACH
 Don't Even Think About Changing Her.

EGO
 Edging God Out

FEAR
 False Evidence Appearing Real

FINE
 Freaked-out, Insecure, Neurotic, Emotional

GOD
 Good Orderly Direction

HALT
 Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired (*Courage to Be Me*, 1994, p. 139; *Hope for Today*, p. 96)

HOPE
 Hang On – Pain Ends.

HOW
 Honest, Open, Willing

JADE
 Justify, Argue, Defend, Explain

KISS
 Keep it Simple, Stupid

LOVE
 Let Others Voluntarily Evolve

MYOB
 Mind Your Own Business

M & M's The Four Ms
 Managing, Mothering, Manipulating,
 Martyrdom (*Hope for Today*, p. 313)

NUTS
 Not Using the Steps

PPPP The Four Ps
 Pain, Perspective, Patience, Payoff (*Paths to Recovery*, Al-Anon, 1997, p. 67)

PAUSE
 Postpone Action Until Serenity Emerges.

PAUSE
 Patience and Understanding Succeed
 Everytime.

QTIP
 Quit Taking it Personally.

RAM

Responsibility, Accountability, Maturity

SHIT

Simply How I Think

SHOW

Strength, Hope, and Experience Win.

SSS The Three Ss

Show up, Speak up, Shut up (Concept 4)

THINK

Thoughtful, Honest, Intelligent, Necessary,
Kind (*Paths to Recovery*, 1997, p. 106)

TTT The Three Ts

Time, Talent, Treasure (Tradition 7)

WAIT

Why Am I Talking?

WAIST

Why Am I Still Talking?

WAIT

What Am I Thinking?

Slogans ⁴

What is the most common slogan contained in Al-Anon literature? The answer is “Live and Let Live.” It is the only slogan contained in all four of Al-Anon’s daily readers.

A conversation is not an opportunity for me to be right.

A closed fist can punch through a way, but it takes an open hand to repair one.

A coincidence is a small miracle when God chooses to remain anonymous.

A mistake a day keeps my perfectionism at bay (*Hope for Today*, Al-Anon, 2002, p. 335).

Acceptance is the key to serenity.

Acceptance is the opposite of resentment.

Act as if they are doing the best they can with what they have to do it with.

Alcoholics control through anger and guilt.

Alcoholism is the gift that keeps on taking.

Am I who I am because I’m with an alcoholic, or am I with an alcoholic because of who I am?

Anger is related to my fear—of losing something I have or not getting what I want.

Become better rather than bitter.

Bless them; change me.

By the grace of God . . .

Caretaking is not the same as caring.

Change begins when the discomfort of staying the same is greater than the discomfort of the uncertainty of change.

Change begins when the fear of change is outweighed by my fear of remaining the same.

Changed attitudes aid recovery.

Coincidences are God’s way of remaining anonymous.

Courage is fear with a prayer added to it.

Denial is not a river in Egypt.

Direction determines destination.

Do things for fun and for free.

Don’t Even kNow I Am Lying (DENIAL)

Don’t Even Think About Changing Her/Him.
(DETACH)

Don’t just talk the talk, but walk the walk.

Don't let the urgent drive out the important.

Do I want to be right or do I want to be happy?

Do the next right thing – and let go of the outcome.

Easy does it.

Envy is a disguised form of self-pity.

Envy is nothing more than a hostile form of self-pity (*Courage to Change*, Al-Anon, 1992, p. 170).

Expectations are premeditated resentments.

Faith is hope with a track record.

Fear and faith cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

Fear is faith turned inside out.

“Figure it out” is not a slogan. (The slogan is “Reason it out with someone else.”)

First things first.

Get out of myself. Get into others. Get into God. (The Twelve Steps)

Giving unsolicited advice is a disguised form a criticism.

God doesn't teach us to pilot a ship on calm waters.

God enables us to “match calamity with serenity” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, AA World Services, 2001, p. 68).

God is in the present. If I'm in the future, then God will be here when I get back.

God is more concerned with my character than my comfort.

God takes my obstacles and turns them into stepping stones.

Holding on to resentment is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill the other person.

Hope is the future tense of faith.

How do I express love the most when someone seems to deserve it the least?

How important is it?

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

I act “as if” I believed – and it works (Step 3).

I am not responsible for my first feeling, but I am responsible for my second thought.

I am not responsible for my first thought, but I am responsible for my first action.

I came; I came to; I came to believe . . . (Step 2).

I can act my way into better thinking faster than I can think myself into better actions.

I can be right or I can be happy.

I can be right or I can be in a relationship.

I can be in the storm but the storm doesn't have to be in me.

I can be in the storm but I don't have to be the storm.

I can choose to believe something without understanding it (Step 2).

I can do something for 12 hours that would appall me if I felt that I had to keep it up for a lifetime (*Just for Today*, 1972).

I can do something for 1 hour that would appall me if I felt that I had to keep it up for 24 hours.

I can't be late until I get there.

I can't have intimacy if I don't share intimacy.

I can make living amends by changing the behavior that I used to apologize for.

I can't; He can; I'll let Him (Steps, 1, 2, 3).

I can't be too dumb for this program, but I can be too smart.

I didn't come flying into this program on the wings of victory (Step 1).

I didn't just slip on a banana peeling and get here (Step 1).

I don't believe everything I think.

I got relief from going to meetings, but I got recovery from working the steps.

I have no opinion on the matter (Tradition 10).

I know I'm a know-it-all, but at least now I know to keep my mouth shut.

I try not to let the facts get in the way of my beliefs (Pre-program).

I pray on my knees so I know who's asking Whom.

I want to take the tiller and have God do the rowing – but God doesn't row.

I was wrong (10th Step).

I will adjust myself to what is, and not try to adjust everything to my own desires (*Just for Today*, Al-Anon, 1972).

If God is my co-pilot, then I need to switch seats.

If I insist I'm right, then I'm insisting someone else is wrong.

If I know I'm right, I can keep it to myself.

If I mind my own business, I'll stay busy all the time.

If I am not entirely ready for my defects to be removed, then what's the payoff?	Keep coming back; it works if you work it.
If I stop people-pleasing, some people will not be pleased.	Keep coming back; it works if you work it; it won't if you don't.
If I'm not the problem, then there's no solution.	Keep it simple.
If I'm talking, then I'm not listening.	Leave people, places, and things a little better than I find them each day.
If you need an answer right this moment, then the answer is "No" because I need to think about it.	Let go and let God.
"Intimacy" means into me see.	Let go – or be dragged.
Insanity is doing the same thing over and over – and expecting different results.	Let go of the rope.
Is it mine? Is it real? Is it now?	Let it begin with me.
Isolation is the key to misery (opposite of Concept 4).	Let me think about it.
It works if you work it.	Life is happening for me – not to me.
It's a mystery.	Listen and learn.
It's never too late to do the right thing.	Listen and Silent have the same letters.
It's never too late to start a new day (<i>Hope for Today</i> , Al-Anon, 2002, p. 143).	Live and let live.
It's not your aptitude but your attitude that determines your altitude.	Mind my own business.
Keep an open mind.	My defects of character are only a choice away.
Keep coming back.	My ego gives me what I want; God gives me what I need.
	"No" can be a good form of self-care.
	"No" is a complete sentence.

No matter whose fault I think it is, I always ask what my part has been.

No one comes into the program as their first choice – it is usually their last resort.

Normal is just a setting on a dryer.

Nothing changes if nothing changes.

One day at a time

One step at a time

Participation is the key to harmony (Concept 4).

People prefer the certainty of misery to the misery of uncertainty (Virginia Satir).

Postpone Action Until Serenity Emerges (PAUSE).

Practice an attitude of gratitude.

Practice radical acceptance.

Principles above personalities (Al-Anon) ⁵

Principles before personalities (AA)

Progress – not perfection

Putting the focus on me complicates my ability to place blame others.

Quit Taking it Personally (QTIP).

Quit taking the bait.

Resentment is like setting yourself on fire in the hope that the smoke will bother the other person.

Resentment is the “number one” offender (*Alcoholics Anonymous, AA World Services, 2001, p. 64*).

Resentment is the opposite of acceptance.

Resentment is the strongest form of attachment.

Respond rather than react.

Say what I do and do what I say.

Say what you mean; mean what you say; don't say it mean. ⁶

Saying “No” can be a form of self-care.

Serenity is a practice.

Serenity is an acquired taste.

Serenity is when I let my actions be guided by guided by principles rather than emotions.

Serenity is the practice of letting my actions be guided by principles rather than personalities.

Serenity is the practice of responding rather than reacting.

Some people bless the space when they enter the room; some people bless the space when they leave the room.

Spiritual is incomplete without ritual.

Stand up for myself but not against others.

Stay in the moment.

Stockpiling resentments hurts relationships.

Take my advice – I'm not using it.

Take the mess to my sponsor; take the message to the meeting.

Take your ass and your head will follow.

Tell me more.

The bad news is that you have to change your whole life. The good news is that you only have to do it one day at a time.

The cover up is usually worse than the crime (Step 10).

The ISM in alcoholism is "I sponsor myself."

The most difficult decisions are not between right and wrong, but between right and right.

The next spiritual step is always into the unknown.

The opposite of addiction is connection.

The spiritual part of the program is like the wet part of the ocean.

The way I am living today is the way I am living my life. ⁷

There are many things that are better left unsaid.

There are three obstacles to success: Me, Myself, and I.

There is one thing you can do for the alcoholic: mind your own business. There's no elevator to recovery; take the steps.

There's no wrong way to do a right thing (4th Step).

This, too, shall pass.

Thoughtful, Honest, Intelligent, Necessary, Kind (THINK)

This too shall pass.

Together we can make it.

Tradition 7 is where spirituality meets money.

Unsolicited advice is disguised criticism.

You can sit in a garage for 10 years, but it won't turn you into a race car.

You'll never do wrong by doing the right thing.

Victimology is not a path to responsibility.

Waiting for someone else to change is volunteering to be a victim.

We are only as sick as our deepest secrets.

We can do together what none of us can do alone.

We don't lose serenity by making mistakes, but by defending the mistakes we make.

We laugh together about the things we used to cry about alone.

We usually prefer the misery of certainty to the anxiety of uncertainty.

What Am I Thinking? (WAIT)

What other people think of me is none of my business.

What's my part in it?

When I am rejected by someone, it may be God's way of protect me from something I'm not ready to handle.

When I ASSUME, I make an ASS out of U and Me.

When I don't know what to say, I count to 10.
When I do know what to say, I count to 100.

When I plan things, the unexpected is the thing I most enjoy.

When I understand what I resent, then I'll know what I don't like about myself.

When in doubt, assume it is a compliment.

When surrounded by chaos, try being an observer rather than a participant.

Where is God in this?

Wise men have something to say; fools say something.

With gratitude, optimism is sustainable (Michael J. Fox).

Why Am I Talking? (WAIT)

Why am I talking rather than listening?

You can make plans, but you can't plan the outcome.

You may be right.

Not Slogans

Figure it out.

I sponsor myself.

I told you so.

I was right.

It's your fault.

Let it begin with someone else.

Mind someone else's business.

Put personalities above principles.

Take a bite of the bait.

Take it personally.

You are wrong.

Notes

1. Although Alcoholics Anonymous uses the endearing term *oldtimer* to refer to a member with long term sobriety, Al-Anon eventually began using the politically correct term *longtimer*. By whatever name called, newcomers and oldtimers both have unique values as reflected in the following adage:

“Newcomers tell me where I’ve been.
Oldtimers tell me where I am going.
And a sponsor tells me where I am.”
Anonymous

2. Many items on this list are abbreviations rather than acronyms. An *abbreviation* is a shortened form of words used to represent the whole, whereas an *acronym* contains a set of initial letters from a phrase that usually form another word (such as radar or scuba).

3. In APA Style, apostrophes are generally used to form in contractions and to indicate the possessive case of nouns and pronouns, but they are not used to form plurals of abbreviations, letters, or numbers. For readers who are accustomed to using apostrophes to form plurals, then this item (i.e., The Three As) would be written with an apostrophe (i.e., The Three A’s).

4. Although some Al-Anon members prefer to use only the slogans that have been published in Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature, many of the slogans contained in this paper are part of the oral tradition of members who share them with each other and at meetings. Therefore, this list includes phrases, slogans, and quotations from anonymous sources.

5. The fourth printing of the second edition (January 1, 1973, pp. 561–566) of the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous* had a new appendix that contained both the long and short forms of the Traditions. However, this printing mistakenly listed the short form version that had been published in the November 1949 *AA Grapevine* instead of the version of the Traditions published in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in 1953. The error was not fully corrected until the sixth printing of the second edition of the Big Book in 1963. When compared to the version in the November 1949 *AA Grapevine*, there were two differences that appeared in the sixth printing of the second edition of the AA Big Book and these two changes have endured in subsequent editions of the Big Book:

- (1) AA’s 1973 Tradition 6 (contained in the Big Book) ended in “primary purpose,” whereas AA’s 1949 Tradition 6 (contained in the *Grapevine*) ended with “primary spiritual aim.”
- (2) AA’s 1973 Tradition 12 (contained in the Big Book) ended with “principles before personalities,” whereas AA’s 1949 Tradition 12 (contained in the *Grapevine*) ended with “principles above personalities.”

When Al-Anon adopted its own version of the Traditions, it had to have used the 1949 version from the *AA Grapevine*, which clearly used the terms “primary spiritual aim” in Tradition 6 and “principles above personalities” in Tradition 12.

6. The slogan is usually said this way: "Say what you mean; mean what you say; don't say it mean." However, because the last word is used as an adverb, the word should be stated as an adverb, which would be correctly said this way: "Say what you mean; mean what you say; don't say it meanly." If you noticed this grammatical error, then you may either be a text editor or you may suffer from the "righting reflex" and be a member of Al-Anon.

7. This slogan is adapted from a sentence in Annie Dillard's book, *The Writing Life*. Dillard makes this observation "How we spend our days is of course how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour and that one is what we are doing" (1989, p. 32). In other words, how we live today is how we are living our lives.

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Annie Dillard observes, "How we spend our days is of course how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour and that one is what we are doing" (1989, p. 32). In other words, how we live today is how we are living our life.

Resources

This link contains a list of abbreviations, acronyms, phrases, and slogans:

https://drwilliamdoverspike.com/files/Al-Anon_-_Acronyms_and_Slogans.pdf

This link contains a review of 15 of Al-Anon's most popular slogans:

<https://al-anon.org/for-members/members-resources/literature/al-anon-slogans/>

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