

# AVOIDING FOUR DESTRUCTIVE FORCES



Families Anonymous

# FOUR DESTRUCTIVE FORCES

## *A Basic Reading of Families Anonymous™*

For our meetings to be truly constructive, it is necessary to recognize and repress four destructive forces that can cause dissension and eventually destroy the group.

The **FIRST DESTRUCTIVE FORCE** is the discussion of any religion. Our program is open to all, regardless of our various beliefs, or lack of belief. Each member's understanding of a Higher Power is strictly a personal, private choice.

The **SECOND DESTRUCTIVE FORCE** is gossip. We are here to share *our* feelings, attitudes, and reactions to our situation—to help us in applying the principles of Families Anonymous to our *own* lives. Careless discussion of other people's personal difficulties is contrary to the principles of our program. What we say here—stays here!

The **THIRD DESTRUCTIVE FORCE** is dominance. FA™ is based on suggestion, interchange of experience, and rotation of leaders. No member should direct, assume authority, or give advice. Our leaders are chosen to serve, not to govern.

The **FOURTH DESTRUCTIVE FORCE** is dwelling on the past. Harboring painful thoughts and speaking endlessly about hurtful times with our loved ones block our recovery. Besides being detrimental to our personal progress, continuous behavior of this type within the meeting, week after week, is destructive to the group's progress and unity. Such behavior can lead us back to the Third Destructive Force, which is dominance. Instead, we let go of the past by listening to other members, reading our FA literature, and learning new ways to change our actions and attitudes, thereby improving our lives.

## **Avoiding the FIRST Destructive Force**

*The First Destructive Force is the discussion of any **religion**. Our program is open to all, regardless of our various beliefs, or lack of belief. Each member's understanding of a Higher Power is strictly a personal, private choice.*

### **Is Families Anonymous a religious program?**

No. FA is a fellowship based on *spiritual* principles. It is *not* a religious program.

### **Why does FA consider the discussion of any religion to be a destructive force?**

Any attempt by an FA member to turn a meeting into a religious observance would distort the meeting's purpose. It would specifically violate several of our Traditions, which tell us that ...

- our groups shall have no other affiliation (Tradition Three), religious or otherwise;
- our groups shall have only “one primary purpose: to help those concerned with someone who may have a problem of drug abuse or dependence” (Tradition Five);
- our groups shall not endorse any outside enterprise (Tradition Six); and
- our groups shall “have no opinion on outside issues” (Tradition Ten).

### **Can a person who is religious still be an FA member?**

Yes. On a *personal* level, each of us can tailor the FA program to meet our specific needs. We are free, *in private*, to give as much or as little of a religious dimension to our practice of the program as we would like. What we are *not* allowed to do is bring our religious preferences, convictions or beliefs into the group setting.

### **What if someone does bring up religion during a meeting?**

Any member who recognizes that this First Destructive Force is arising can intercede, firmly yet pleasantly, and call a halt to its use. This member would ideally be the meeting leader or the group secretary, although anyone can step in as needed.

It is important to avoid embarrassing the offending member in front of others. If the discussion needs to be interrupted immediately, one approach could be to say something to the effect of, “Let's avoid the First Destructive Force and keep our religious thoughts to ourselves.” Or, if the person makes a religious reference only briefly and in passing, a reasonable option could be to speak with the offender privately after the meeting.

(For help with this approach, refer to “Service – The Sixth Tool: Tips for Leading Meetings” in *The FA Tools of Recovery* [#5001].)

## **Can any prayers be used during a meeting without violating the First Destructive Force?**

Several prayers have been approved by FA.

One of these is the *Serenity Prayer* (#2008, #3003). As recommended in FA's *Suggested Meeting Format* (which is part of *Suggested Meeting Format with Basic Readings* [#5003]), many groups recite this prayer to close their meetings.

The *Suggested Meeting Format* also has a place, early in the meeting, where each member can offer up a *silent* prayer of his or her own choosing.

A second FA-approved prayer, commonly used within our fellowship and sometimes within our meetings, is *Prayer to a Higher Power* (#2019).

Both the *Serenity Prayer* and *Prayer to a Higher Power* are spiritual in nature and acceptable to virtually all FA members. Neither of these prayers is religious.

## **May a group use a non-FA-approved prayer in its meetings?**

The *Serenity Prayer* and *Prayer to a Higher Power* are the only prayers that have been approved by FA's World Service Board.

A group considering using any other prayer within its meetings should give the matter careful consideration and reach a consensus by group conscience, bearing in mind that the prayer should not be offensive to *any* member and must be in keeping with FA's spiritual principles and Twelve Traditions.

(For information on reaching a consensus by group conscience, refer to "Tradition Two: Our Group and Our Group Conscience" in *The Twelve Traditions in Action* [#5010].)

## **Does one group's decision about prayer affect other FA groups?**

Yes. Tradition Four tells us that "each group is autonomous *except in matters affecting other groups or FA as a whole.*"

One group's choice of prayer *does* affect other groups and FA as a whole and impacts all members of the fellowship. *Newcomers*, not knowing what to expect, will form an immediate, first-experience memory of what they hear. It is for their ears that we set an example of what the fellowship is and how it functions. *Experienced members* will reasonably expect that each FA group whose meetings they attend (whether face-to-face, online, or by phone) will be acting in accordance with the fellowship's primary purpose and its independence from outside influences.

## **Why would a spiritual program like FA welcome people who have “a lack of belief”?**

A *lack of belief* is no barrier to FA membership. This is clearly stated in the First Destructive Force.

However, a person’s acceptance of the existence of some sort of “higher power” *is* integral to any Twelve Step program, including FA’s. Grasping this concept can be challenging for some FA members.

A Higher Power arrives early in our study of the Twelve Steps. Its first appearance is in Step Two, where we accept the presence of some “Power greater than ourselves.” This Power is *spiritual* in nature, separate from an adherence to any particular religion or ideology.

Then, moving forward from Step Two into Step Three, we “turn our will and our lives” over to the care of the Higher Power of *our understanding*. Some members may choose to define their Higher Power in religious terms; others may connect with a more secular concept, such as the spiritual power inherent in nature or the universe, or the abiding encouragement and compassion expressed within their FA group. Some members’ definitions of their Higher Power will be permanent and unalterable; others’ definitions will change as they work the Steps and move through different levels of spiritual awakening. The possibilities are as varied as is the diversity found within our fellowship.

When we turn for help to something greater and more powerful than ourselves, we gain strength to accomplish *the difficult*. And by understanding our Higher Power as being an entity that is *outside* ourselves and beyond our human ability to fully comprehend, we can finally give up acting like *we* are our own Higher Power—or someone else’s.

## **Who can help us as we struggle with the concept of a Higher Power?**

Many FA members turn to their sponsors for guidance.

Sponsorship is a one-on-one relationship between a sponsor and a sponsee. The sponsor is a seasoned FA member, typically a person who has been in the program for at least a year and has studied and worked the Twelve Steps; the sponsee is usually a less-experienced, newer member. Sponsors have an in-depth understanding of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and are able to apply these principles in their own lives. They can provide their sponsees with a framework that encourages, reinforces and supports recovery.

(For more information on *sponsors* and *sponsees*, refer to *FA and Sponsorship* [#1020].)

Some sponsors have found they can make the concept of a Higher Power more concrete by suggesting that their sponsee carry a small “visual tool” in a purse or pocket to remind them of FA’s principles. FA’s *Serenity Medallion* (#3051) is well-suited for this purpose. So are an FA slogan, such as the “Let Go and Let God” bookmark (#3002); FA’s *Serenity Prayer* card (#2008); a meaningful page torn from an old edition of *Today A Better Way*<sup>™</sup> (#1015), and so forth.

## **Does each *group* have its own Higher Power, too?**

Yes. As explained in Tradition Two: “For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as he may express Himself in our group conscience.”

Tradition Two has always used the common convention of referring to a group’s Higher Power in masculine terms. However, each of us is, in reality, free to privately envision the Higher Power in whatever way feels true to us personally.

For some of us, our group’s Higher Power may be the loving kindness of acceptance and understanding that we experience in the fellowship; for others it may be the collective wisdom of our “elders” who preceded us in this program, left their mark on our groups and in our literature, and paved the way for us to move forward in our own recovery.

Regardless of how we individually and privately define our group’s Higher Power, we join together with our fellow FA members in welcoming its work within our group. We trust that the solutions or ideas we need will be expressed through our “group conscience.” We defer to this guidance whenever our group needs help with unsolved issues.

Each of us plays a crucial role in nurturing the spiritual health of our group. We do this by:

- being truthful, courageous, honest and kind
- remaining humble and open-minded
- remembering our own powerlessness
- staying mindful of our shortcomings
- keeping silent and listening attentively when others speak
- letting ourselves be led by the wisdom of our own Higher Power

## ~~ Related Resources for Studying the FIRST Destructive Force ~~

Is your group struggling with this First Destructive Force? If so, we suggest the following related resources to help you recognize it, prevent it, and eliminate it from your meetings. These resources work well for individual study, for group study, and as topics for meetings.

[*Note: Where indicated below, check the Table of Contents or the Index for the term listed.*]

1. *Today a Better Way* (#1015)

→ “God as I Understand Him” [*Index*]

→ “Higher Power” [*Index*]

→ “Step Three” [*Index*]

2. *The Twelve Steps of Families Anonymous* (#1004)

→ Step Three

3. *The Twelve Step Workbook* (#1019)

→ Step Three

4. *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010)

→ Tradition One – “Spirituality” [*Table of Contents*]

→ Tradition Two – “One Authority” [*Table of Contents*]

– “Our Group & Our Group Conscience” [*Table of Contents*]

→ Tradition Four – “Affecting Other Groups or FA as a Whole” [*Table of Contents*]

→ Tradition Five – “Primary Purpose” [*Table of Contents*]

→ Tradition Twelve

5. *The FA Tools of Recovery* (#5001)

→ Service – The Sixth Tool – “Tips for Leading Meetings” [*Table of Contents*]

6. *FA and Sponsorship* (#1020)

## **Avoiding the SECOND Destructive Force**

*The Second Destructive Force is **gossip**. We are here to share our feelings, attitudes, and reactions to our situation—to help us in applying the principles of Families Anonymous to our own lives. Careless discussion of other people's personal difficulties is contrary to the principles of our program. What we say here—stays here!*

### **How can we talk about ourselves without talking about our loved ones who brought us to FA?**

In FA we tell our own stories, not those of our spouse, our children, our friends, other FA members, or anyone else.

Of course, we do not live in isolation. Other people's lives intersect with our own. Thus, when speaking about ourselves, we may sometimes need to share details of another person's story.

However, we share these details only as they relate to our own problems, feelings, attitudes and actions, and only as they pertain to us and our recovery. We never use this as an excuse for spreading gossip or for failing to uphold someone else's anonymity.

### **What is the difference between sharing and gossiping?**

*Sharing* is speaking about *ourselves*. *Gossiping* is speaking about *other people*.

*Sharing* is central to our FA program. It means speaking of *our own* experiences and hopes, challenges and strengths, failures and successes. It is about focusing on *our own* growth as we apply the program's principles. It is about making personal progress toward self-understanding and compassion and improving our relationships with others.

*Gossiping*, on the other hand, has no place in FA. Gossiping is contrary to a number of FA's Traditions, among them the overriding imperative for groups and members to preserve everyone's anonymity:

- Tradition 11: "We need guard with special care the anonymity of our members as well as those of other recovery programs."
- Tradition 12: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities."

*[This answer continues on the next page.]*

Thus, we are always careful to refrain from gossiping whether within or outside of our meetings. We do this by:

- not spreading idle talk about the personal affairs of our members or their loved ones
- not repeating unfounded rumors about someone's supposed deeds or misdeeds
- not divulging private information to which we are privy
- not engaging in any similar behaviors that might violate someone else's boundaries

Avoiding the Second Destructive Force helps us keep our attention where it belongs: on ourselves.

### **Why do some newer members seem to be more prone to gossip than longtime members?**

Although newer members frequently hesitate to speak during their first few meetings, later on, once they start opening up, they may keep reverting to a repetitive monologue that reveals their obsessions with their loved ones.

There are many possible reasons for this behavior:

- They may not yet understand the absolute necessity of focusing on themselves and not on anyone else.
- They may be resistant to accepting the reality that they are powerless to “fix” their loved ones.
- They may be protecting themselves from having to look honestly at the many (often destructive and counterproductive) roles they are playing in their family dynamics.
- They may be confusing self-care with self-centeredness or selfishness.

As they continue attending meetings and working the program, they will learn more about themselves, and these issues will most likely be resolved.

### **Is there a limit to how long a group should allow newer members to continue rehashing details about someone else's problems?**

Giving newer members an opportunity to release their thoughts and feelings in a group setting, without being judged, questioned, advised or lectured to, can be a great incentive for them to “keep coming back.” However, when allowed to be taken to an extreme, this form of sharing can be destructive to the serenity and cohesion of the group.

It is important to keep in mind that our meetings are for *all* our members. Our meetings work best when *no* member is allowed to dominate the discussion (see the Third Destructive Force); when *every* member who wants to share has a chance to do so; when our sharing stays on topic; when we resist getting bogged down in the stories of our past; and when we strive to keep moving forward on our paths of recovery.

## **Some members do need time for retelling and working through their stories. What are some ways they can be accommodated?**

FA's *Suggested Meeting Format* (which is part of *Suggested Meeting Format with Basic Readings* [#5003]) proposes that we leave a limited time (depending on the number of newcomers) before closing our meetings to invite new members to share or ask questions about the FA program. If they engage in too much discussion of the past, we can gently remind them that this program is for us and suggest that they focus on the present and on their *own* actions, reactions and recovery. We can extend this same invitation to other members who might have chosen to not speak earlier.

We can also take this time to remind everyone about sponsorship: its purpose, how it works, and suggestions for finding a sponsor in the group. Sponsorship affords a struggling member (the *sponsee*) a confidential, one-on-one setting in which to work through difficult stories with the help of a more-experienced member (the *sponsor*) who is well-versed in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. A kind and caring sponsor–sponsee relationship is a powerful supplement to our meetings (though never a substitute for them).

Yet another opportunity for interacting with a struggling member is *after* the meeting ends and as the room is being closed down. During this unstructured period, we can chat personally with new members (and others), listen to more of their stories, thank them for coming, and encourage them to come back to learn more.

## **What are some tactful ways we can avoid gossip during our meetings?**

One simple way to avoid gossip and keep our group's discussion focused on the meeting topic is by setting a good example. When it is our turn to share our own stories, we can choose to tell of *our* experiences, struggles, shortcomings, successes and progress *as they relate to the meeting topic*.

When this model is met by only limited success and the discussion persists in wandering off course, we can try a more corrective approach by explicitly redirecting the group back to the meeting topic. We can do this by calling attention, specifically yet diplomatically, to this Second Destructive Force and reminding everyone that we are meant to share about ourselves, not anyone else. Newer members, especially, may benefit from redirection of this kind, although even longtime members may need occasional reminders.

When we steer clear of gossip, share in appropriate ways, and engage in thoughtful listening, we are not only avoiding this Second Destructive Force. We are also staying true to Tradition One (which tells us that we achieve personal progress through group unity), and we are avoiding the Third Destructive Force, which is dominance.

~~ **Related Resources for Studying the SECOND Destructive Force** ~~

Is your group struggling with this Second Destructive Force? If so, we suggest the following related resources to help you recognize it, prevent it, and eliminate it from your meetings. These resources work well for individual study, for group study, and as topics for meetings.

[*Note: Where indicated below, check the Table of Contents or the Index for the term listed.*]

1. *Today a Better Way* (#1015)

→ “Anonymity” [*Index*]

→ “Gossip” [*Index*]

→ “Inventory” [*Index*]

2. *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010)

→ Tradition One – “Member Behavior” [*Table of Contents*]

→ Tradition Eleven – “Anonymity Within Our Meetings” [*Table of Contents*]

3. *The FA Tools of Recovery* (#5001)

→ Service – The Sixth Tool – “Tips for Leading Meetings” [*Table of Contents*]

→ Anonymity – The Eighth Tool [*Table of Contents*]

4. *The Face of Anonymity* (#5014)

5. *FA and Sponsorship* (#1020)

## **Avoiding the THIRD Destructive Force**

*The Third Destructive Force is **dominance**. FA is based on suggestion, interchange of experience, and rotation of leaders. No member should direct, assume authority, or give advice. Our leaders are chosen to serve, not to govern.*

### **Can longtime members, who are more familiar with the FA program, ever act as counselors to other members?**

No. No member should try to counsel any other member. Offering guidance, voicing an opinion, giving instructions—these and other such behaviors are not consistent with FA’s definition of *helping* (which is “being” for others, not “doing” for them). These behaviors are apt to lead, directly or indirectly, to one member’s *dominance* over other members.

All of us must avoid any temptation to “play therapist.” This includes attempting to analyze another member’s feelings or actions or give specific advice.

Counseling is *not* the same as sponsorship. Sponsorship is an effective recovery tool widely used in FA and other Twelve Step programs. It is discussed in more detail in the First, Second and Fourth Destructive Forces.

### **How can we assist other members in ways that are open-minded and nonjudgmental?**

Any “assistance” we offer during our meetings should be confined to relating our personal experiences, strengths and hopes. We allow other members the freedom to choose, for themselves, which of our words are relevant to their own lives.

We can mention ideas for their consideration. We can describe what has worked well for us personally and what has not. We can discuss our own character defects and assets, as discovered through doing a Step Four “searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” We can share the progress we are making in our own recovery.

We make a practice of listening patiently, attentively, compassionately and nonjudgmentally as other members share their stories. We leave behind, at the meeting room door, any expectations we might have for ourselves or anyone else, recognizing that each of us is in a different place, and proceeding at a different pace, in our recovery.

In all these ways, we can contribute to a safe space where everyone is welcome to share, heal, and find their own personal guidance.

## **What are some actions we should avoid?**

There are several actions to avoid at all costs: First, we may not take a fellow member's inventory. And second, we may not point out what we see as another member's character defects or lapses in judgment or action.

To do either of these things would convey a message that we consider ourselves to be smarter, wiser or, in some other respect, better than they are. It would also most likely make them feel defensive, discourage their honesty, and dilute the value of our program's primary tool, which is our meetings.

Our personal humility, along with our empathy for and identification with other members' feelings and circumstances, are what make our FA program work.

## **How do FA groups encourage longtime members to “keep coming back”?**

Most longtime members carry FA's history and traditions with them as they live the program day by day. As such, they play a crucial role in sustaining the vitality of their groups. If all of us were to stop attending meetings as soon as our personal situations seemed to be resolved, our groups would be unable to survive.

By continuing to attend meetings, we are not only helping *ourselves* maintain our own recoveries; we are also helping *others* who are coming to our meetings with similar problems. We are being there for newcomers, just as others have been and are there for us. We are putting into practice FA's primary purpose, as expressed in Tradition Five.

Many members keep coming back for many years, for some or all of the following reasons:

- We feel a special connection to FA. We cherish a deep spirit of gratitude to the program, and to our group, for the life-changing help we have received.
- We return to support others who are struggling with addiction and related behavioral problems in their families.
- We return to reinforce our own personal skills in applying the FA principles to our everyday problems of living.
- We appreciate our meetings as weekly “tune-ups” that help us grow, stay in recovery, and maintain our serenity and spirituality.
- And, finally, we are aware that we really cannot keep what we have unless we also give it away. We return to support our group, so that our group may continue helping others; and we return to support the entire fellowship.

Members whose group adheres to FA's Twelve Traditions and avoids FA's Four Destructive Forces can rest assured that even if they must miss their meetings for a time, they can expect to find the same loving fellowship when they return.

## ~~ Related Resources for Studying the THIRD Destructive Force ~~

Is your group struggling with this Third Destructive Force? If so, we suggest the following related resources to help you recognize it, prevent it, and eliminate it from your meetings. These resources work well for individual study, for group study, and as topics for meetings.

[*Note: Where indicated below, check the Table of Contents or the Index for the term listed.*]

1. *Today a Better Way* (#1015)

- “Change(s)” [*Index*]
- “Inventory” [*Index*]
- “Keep Coming Back” [*Index*]
- “Let Go” [*Index*]

2. *The Twelve Steps of Families Anonymous* (#1004)

- Step Four

3. *The Twelve Step Workbook* (#1019)

- Step Four

4. *The Fourth Step Workbook* (#1006)

5. *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010)

- Tradition One – “Member Behavior” [*Table of Contents*]
- Tradition Two – “Group-conscience Meetings” [*Table of Contents*]
  - “Conclusion” [*Table of Contents*]
  - “Tradition Two in Action” [*Table of Contents*]
- Tradition Four – “Meeting Leaders” [*Table of Contents*]
- Tradition Nine – “Groups” [*Table of Contents*]
  - “Tradition Nine in Action” [*Table of Contents*]

## **Avoiding the FOURTH Destructive Force**

*The Fourth Destructive Force is **dwelling on the past**. Harboring painful thoughts and speaking endlessly about hurtful times with our loved ones block our recovery. Besides being detrimental to our personal progress, continuous behavior of this type within the meeting, week after week, is destructive to the group's progress and unity. Such behavior can lead us back to the Third Destructive Force, which is dominance. Instead, we let go of the past by listening to other members, reading our FA literature, and learning new ways to change our actions and attitudes, thereby improving our lives.*

### **What should the group do if a member keeps bringing up the past?**

Newer members may need an opportunity to release their pent-up feelings of hurt, anger, betrayal and resentment. As we clear our mind of such feelings, we are creating space in which to formulate newer and healthier thoughts, attitudes and behaviors.

Venting is perfectly understandable at a newcomer's first several meetings, when he or she finally chooses to speak. After that, a new member (or *any* member) locked in the throes of painful past experiences should be encouraged to seek a sponsor with whom to work privately on *letting go of the past*.

### **What are the downfalls of a group *not* addressing this Fourth Destructive Force?**

First, if members are allowed to use precious meeting time to dwell on the past, week after week, they will become *stuck* in that past, making their recovery more difficult.

Second, this type of repetitive sharing has a detrimental effect on other members who have a need to share their own experiences and the challenges they are encountering as they work their own programs of recovery.

Third, it may give newcomers the wrong impression of what an FA meeting really is.

### **What are some tactful ways we can redirect the group's discussion away from the past and into the present?**

To help move the discussion back on track, a member of the group, such as the meeting leader or group secretary, could read aloud Tradition One, which tells us that "our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity." If this Tradition, or any other, is disregarded, the health and effectiveness of the group will suffer.

The group could also ask a member knowledgeable about the Twelve Traditions to speak privately with the erring member and explain the importance of Tradition One in maintaining group unity. The objective would be to provide information and persuade that person to accept the idea of recovery through personal growth and change. This is a vital goal in all FA groups, for the sake of all members, present and future.

## ~~ Related Resources for Studying the FOURTH Destructive Force ~~

Is your group struggling with this Fourth Destructive Force? If so, we suggest the following related resources to help you recognize, prevent and eliminate it from your meetings. These resources work well for individual study, for group study, and as topics for meetings.

[*Note: Where indicated below, check the Table of Contents or the Index for the term listed.*]

### 1. *Today a Better Way* (#1015)

- “Fourth Destructive Force” [*Index*]
- “Let Go” [*Index*]
- “Sponsors” [*Index*]

### 2. *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010)

- Tradition One – “Member Behavior” [*Table of Contents*]
- Tradition Four – “Meeting Leaders” [*Table of Contents*]
- Tradition Five – “Why Do Some People Not Return?” [*Table of Contents*]
- Tradition Nine – “Groups” [*Table of Contents*]

### 3. *FA Tools of Recovery* (#5001)

- Service – The Sixth Tool – “Tips for Leading Meetings (Dominance)” [*Table of Contents*]
- “Topic Meetings Using Sponsorship” [*Table of Contents*]

### 4. *FA and Sponsorship* (#1020)

### 5. *Letting Go, Letting Grow* (#2012)

## THE CHALLENGE TO GROUPS

*Work diligently to  
RECOGNIZE these Four Destructive Forces and  
PREVENT and ELIMINATE them from your meetings.*

*Recognizing* the presence of these Four Destructive Forces—religion, gossip, dominance, and dwelling on the past—and the potential problems they can cause within our groups is not as easy as it may seem. It requires foresight, awareness, and a focus on FA principles and group unity.

*Preventing* and *eliminating* these Four Destructive Forces depends on challenging our old ways and established attitudes. Because these forces can set in motion such potentially destructive effects, it is essential that we work diligently to overcome them, both for our personal growth and for the good of our group.

***Religion:*** Remaining close-mouthed about our religious affiliations, and refraining from using religious terms during our meetings, will help put other members at ease and avoid digression from the topic under discussion.

***Gossip:*** Curtailing our human tendency to talk about others is a difficult challenge. How easy it is for extraneous information—names, places, certain beliefs, other people’s experiences—to come rolling off our tongues, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes with forethought. In our FA meetings, we view information about anyone other than ourselves as having no relevance to what we are sharing or to the specific topic of a meeting, *unless it is part of our own situation or actions.*

***Dominance:*** Members who provide professional or administrative services in their private lives may find it especially difficult to separate themselves from this mode of thinking so as to learn new attitudes and behaviors. These members may volunteer to lead meetings frequently, either because they do it well or because no one else wishes to take the initiative. Gently emphasizing how the group will benefit from sharing this form of group service may encourage other members to lead meetings as well as participate in discussions.

***Dwelling on the past:*** Explaining sponsorship and maintaining a list of available sponsors can provide support to those who are “caught up in the past.” Keeping the telephone list up to date will also help members who just need to hear the friendly voice of another member who understands and listens. Maintaining and regularly updating an email list is another approach used by some groups to facilitate contact between and among current members.

*[This concluding section continues on the next page.]*

The reward for avoiding these Four Destructive Forces is a group that functions more smoothly and where attendees can feel safe, comfortable, welcome, and able to contribute. Members who are conscious of the importance of *unity* within the group are more apt to catch themselves before saying or doing something that is discouraged by these Four Destructive Forces or by FA's Twelve Traditions.

Each group is important to the overall well-being of the entire FA fellowship. Healthy thinking and thoughtful sharing promote a *healthy group*. A healthy group encourages *personal recovery* among its members. With personal recovery being FA's *ultimate goal*, it is obvious how important each group is to the overall good of the entire FA fellowship.

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