

Tradition Four: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other Nar-Anon Family Groups, or NA as a whole.

In Nar-Anon we carry a message of hope by following the principles of the program. In our meetings we carry the message of recovery, strive for a deeper understanding of ourselves, and learn to use the Nar-Anon tools. Groups are free to choose the meeting format, topics, readings, and outreach efforts. At meetings members focus on the steps, traditions, and use conference approved literature (CAL). We also abide by the Twelve Concepts of Service, which guide our service structure. Our one purpose is to give help and hope to those who seek it.

Tradition Four embraces our diversity and safeguards our program of recovery. Each group has its own style and customs developed from the spirit of its members. No matter what language we speak, the message is the same. We reinforce the message when we share our experience, strength, and hope. Spiritual principles connect all the traditions. Each group is a part of the worldwide fellowship; what happens with one has possible consequences for all.

Suggestions for Applying Tradition Four

- Allow groups and individuals to make mistakes.
- Experiment with what brings success.
- Keep in mind what works for one meeting may not be successful in another.
- Be conscious of what we say.
- A diverse fellowship is attractive.
- Unity does not require uniformity.
- Different does not mean wrong.
- Be aware of what affects other groups or NA as a whole.

Nar-Anon groups are free to individualize their meetings. The Fourth Tradition guides us, ensuring that a member can walk into a meeting anywhere and receive a consistent message. It reminds us autonomy does not give us permission to reinvent Nar-Anon to our liking. It allows us the flexibility to make our groups welcoming and to choose readings from a variety of Nar-Anon literature. We can customize meetings to reflect many topics, including working the steps, reading articles from the Serenity Connection newsletter, and using conference approved workbooks and pamphlets. As a worldwide fellowship, we strive to maintain the integrity of Nar-Anon by not diluting the program. We weaken our program when we reference or discuss outside materials from other fellowships or sources. When our message is unified, we feel at home whether at our home group or a meeting far away.

Nar-Anon Family Groups are not affiliated with Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Tradition Four reminds us that NA is autonomous and a separate entity from Nar-Anon. We do not involve ourselves in the business of NA, nor do anything that could adversely affect them.

~ As a Group ~

Tradition Four gives our groups freedom through the principle of autonomy. That freedom comes with responsibility as outlined in our Guide to Local Services (GLS). It is helpful to

study all the traditions to understand the matters which can affect other Nar-Anon Family Groups. If any Nar-Anon group wanders too far away from the guidelines, it can harm other groups. When there is a choice to be made regarding group autonomy, we avoid justification and rationalization. When making decisions, always keep in mind the common welfare of Nar-Anon.

Autonomy means self-governing, not subject to control from outside. This does not mean our groups are independent of one another. We are interdependent. The second part of the Fourth Tradition states, "...except in matters affecting other Nar-Anon Family Groups, or NA as a whole." To understand what this means, consider some matters that might affect other Nar-Anon Family Groups:

- revising the Steps, Traditions, or Concepts of Service,
- reading material other than conference approved literature (CAL),
- communicating what happens in a meeting outside of a meeting,
- misuse of the group contact list,
- inappropriate use of Seventh Tradition funds.

Some matters that do not affect other groups:

- which CAL we choose to read,
- term of service and duties of trusted servants,
- how many times a week a group meets,
- whether to serve refreshments,
- meeting format,
- day, time, and length of the meeting.

1. How does my home group practice autonomy?
2. How is group autonomy connected to Tradition One?
3. In what ways could the decisions of the group adversely affect other Nar-Anon Family Groups?
4. How can the decisions of the group affect NA?
5. What does it mean to be interdependent?

Groups are the basic building blocks of the Nar-Anon program. With humility and gratitude we choose to adhere to the traditions and concepts of service. This keeps our meetings healthy and allows the group to offer comfort and hope to all who seek help in Nar-Anon. A meeting may be the only hour of serenity in our sometimes chaotic lives.

6. Why do we use only CAL in our groups?
7. What would we expect to be similar when visiting another meeting?
8. What is my home group doing that may affect other Nar-Anon groups or the fellowship as a whole?

The traditions and the principles of Nar-Anon provide the structure for our family groups while supporting group autonomy and freedom. Embracing our diversity safeguards our

program of recovery. We have a universal message and recovery language and find we are more alike than we are different. We try to create meetings that are warm and welcoming.

~ Members share ~

~ When traveling, I try to attend meetings in cities along the way. I find comfort in knowing when I attend a meeting, I am going to hear people share on the message of Nar-Anon. I have attended meetings that used outside literature, including religious literature. I have also attended meetings that did not follow the format used in most Nar-Anon meetings of sharing without crosstalk. I left feeling worse than when I walked in the door. The discomfort being around new people is common among those with addiction in their lives. A consistent message ensures that no matter where a member attends a meeting, they will be able to receive the comfort they seek.

~ Much to my chagrin at a recent Nar-Anon Convention the topic of conference approved literature was addressed. The speaker mentioned that reading literature that is Nar-Anon but not the latest approved edition is no longer accepted as CAL. When I looked at the most recent Blue Booklet, I realized I had been missing an important paragraph of "Keeping Our Meetings Healthy." Even though I am a long-time member of the fellowship, I may miss something of value if I don't use up -to-date literature. As a long-timer, I feel I should set a good example for the newcomers.

~ As a Member ~

When we understand and live by the traditions, we have a responsibility to remind the group to apply them. Our actions always have consequences, whether positive or negative. If we veer away from the program's principles, we harm the unity and common welfare of the group. Including the traditions during our meetings builds autonomy and healthier groups. An open mind helps us be aware of our behavior and how it might affect the meeting, its members, and the fellowship.

All members are equal; no person is the governing authority in our groups. Each member is responsible for adhering to the principles of the program. While many of us find value in outside literature, religious ideas, poems, or articles, we do not bring them into our meetings. We also leave our professions at the door. We choose to be considerate in these ways to maintain equality and anonymity. Our actions have a direct effect on the group. When we participate, silence our digital devices, and give the meeting our full attention, we contribute to a safe environment. Some of us come early and stay late to offer support to struggling members. By respecting the traditions and guidelines, our message stays consistent.

Each member chooses to place principles above personalities to ensure Nar-Anon can carry out its one purpose, to help those affected by someone else's addiction.

9. How can Tradition Four help me avoid being critical of other meetings?

10. What is my understanding of the principle of group autonomy?
11. How can my behavior affect another Nar-Anon group?
12. How could something I do adversely affect NA as a whole?

~ In Relationships ~

Family

Tradition Four is a tradition we can easily apply to our personal lives. In Step One, we admit we lack the power to influence the character, behavior, or development of another. By using the slogans, we learn to keep the focus on ourselves and our recovery. Without knowing it, we have been practicing the principle of autonomy all along. Autonomy is allowing others the dignity and freedom to be who they are and make their own decisions. We do not have to agree with or like their choices to be in a relationship with them.

We offer autonomy to others as a sign of respect, understanding, and love. We practice autonomy ourselves when we take responsibility for our choices, feelings, actions, words, and thoughts. We get a better perspective on our obsession with the addict's well-being when we focus on the family as a whole. Keeping our relationships healthy by practicing autonomy provides a chance for everyone to recover.

Tradition Four is conditional. We can practice autonomy when our actions do not negatively affect others. In other words, we have autonomy until our choices affect family unity and welfare. Some of us ask ourselves questions when applying Tradition Four in our homes. Do I treat others the way I want to be treated? What is my motive? Will my actions and choices infringe on the well-being of those around me? Consideration, politeness, and thoughtfulness are the touchstone principles of Tradition Four. We choose to put the benefit of our family before our personal desires. Does all this mean we do not have rights? No. Tradition Four asks us to be conscious of how our behaviors, choices, and words affect others.

A member shares: *I try to use the traditions in all kinds of group gatherings, especially at home. We have a common welfare and a common cause. Trying to see the health of my family or a group as more important than my desires, keeps me humble. I remember it is not just about me. Others matter just as much. What a gift it is to see it that way. I am open to hearing what others have to say.*

13. What tools can I use to determine if my decisions are affecting others?
14. What spiritual principles in Tradition Four help my relationship with my family?
15. How can Tradition Four be applied to my personal life?

Workplace

Whether we admit it or not, we are interdependent with the world around us. We can make a difference with our actions, words, and thoughts. What we do and how we do it impacts others. The practice of autonomy in our work makes us an asset.

We learned to trust by working the steps. Now we extend the same trust to our work environment. We have faith in a Power greater than ourselves, knowing we are not alone. We trust ourselves and our co-workers to get the job done. Our differences can make us useful, as each of us has a gift to give to our community. The practice of autonomy makes it safe for everyone to be themselves. Having the willingness to reflect on how we communicate with others humbles us. If we focus too much on our autonomy, we lose the vision of our common welfare and primary purpose. It takes time for us to practice these principles in our workplace. When we remember to practice Tradition Four on the job, we bring the principles of teamwork, harmony, and unity with us.

16. How do I apply the principle of autonomy at work?
17. How does my attitude affect others in the workplace?

In Service

Service committees are created by the groups and accountable to those they serve. According to Concept One *...the Nar-Anon Family Groups have joined together to create a structure that develops, coordinates, and maintains services on behalf of Nar-Anon as a whole.* The service structure is composed of committees that organize events and develop such things as websites, meeting directories, literature, and meet other needs of the fellowship. This frees the groups to focus on carrying the message to those who are still suffering.

Groups have autonomy, service committees do not. Ultimately, groups are responsible for funding the service structure as well as contributing ideas and volunteers. The committees are assigned duties and the authority to carry them out on behalf of their forming bodies. Groups, and the entire fellowship remain self-supporting when members serve on these committees.

Regular two-way communication occurs between the service committees and the body they serve. To be effective and have integrity, committees report to the group, area, region, national, or world levels. Regular reports keep the committees accountable for their activities and finances.

18. Why don't the committees have autonomy?
19. Why are committees responsible to give regular reports to those they serve?
20. Why is it important for groups to communicate their needs to the service structure?

~ Reflections on Tradition Four ~

The autonomy described in Tradition Four allows each group to decide what is best for its members with the understanding the group will abide by the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts of Service, Nar-Anon's guidelines and principles. This tradition ensures decisions made by one group do not affect other groups adversely or present an

unfavorable or inaccurate picture of Nar-Anon or NA as a whole. Each of us is responsible for thinking about the possible effects of our decisions.

We now understand and are open to the idea that we can apply autonomy in our personal lives. Recognizing the autonomy of our family members allows us to focus on our growth. We no longer orchestrate the lives of others; we work on improving our own.

Once we accept that we all make mistakes, we can be gentle with ourselves and others. We learn to practice acceptance and goodwill by applying Tradition Four in all aspects of our lives.

APPROVAL DRAFT - NOT FOR USE IN MEETINGS