

Understanding Crosstalk in CoDA

Adapted from CoDA materials by Alana N
Handout from "Let's Talk About Crosstalk" MinnCoDA Workshop

What is Crosstalk?

- A boundary violation, either of the group or an individual
- Anything that interrupts the flow of someone's sharing and/or emotions
- Anything that shifts the focus from ourselves to someone else, such as discussing people, places, or things that don't pertain to our own recovery (even if solicited). When our sharing focuses on *others* – who *they* are, and what *they* may be thinking or doing – we are in our disease. Attempting to respond in a way to get certain results (becoming 'other' oriented).
- Can be verbal or non-verbal (including sounds, physical actions, body language, and facial expressions)
- Can be things our society might consider positive or negative in nature
- Can be used as a coping mechanism to try to lower the intensity of feelings about ourselves or others, which can inhibit our recovery
- Can stir a wide range of emotions, including sadness, anger, shame, judgment, distraction, nervousness, discomfort, isolation, embarrassment, misunderstood, resentment, jealousy, self-righteousness, and judgment

Examples of Crosstalk may include, but are not limited to:

- Engaging in distracting behaviors (noisy food wrappers, side conversations or 'looks', phone use/sounds, standing/stretching, etc)
- Reacting to or commenting directly about something that a specific person said during the meeting
- Speaking directly to one person, sustained eye contact with one person while sharing, or referring to someone at the meeting by name in your share
- Asking/answering questions, advising, giving unsolicited feedback or suggestions, or attempts to 'help' during the meeting
- Interrupting, controlling, dominating, minimizing, or showing approval/disapproval during a meeting
- Physical contact/touch during the meeting, or without permission after the meeting
- Making verbal sounds/noises during shares (grunts, scoffs, umm hmms, snickers, etc)
- Reactive body language during shares (scowling, eye rolling, excessive nodding or facial expressions)
- Comforting, rescuing, or caretaking (handing someone a tissue without being asked, offering money/assistance to someone, etc)
- Making "you" or "we" statements
- Giving excessive details about others instead of focusing on your own recovery
- Judging, criticizing, correcting, interrogating, debating, or minimizing another person's feelings or experiences
- Approval-seeking behaviors (winking, sympathetic laughing, trying to elicit responses in others)

What is the purpose of Crosstalk & sharing guidelines?

As children, many of us learned that what we had to say did not matter. We were frequently interrupted & criticized. Because of this, it can be scary to share openly and honestly with other people despite our desire to be seen, heard, and understood. In recovery, we learn that one person's truth is not necessarily someone else's. In CoDA, each of us has a right to our own reality. To simply give a speaker our attention without comment creates a new way of relating to each other. We are free to attend to our own internal responses to what is shared without obligation to correct, add to, build up, or 'help' the speaker.

Crosstalk guidelines help to:

- Learn new behaviors by keeping meetings free of distractions, focused on our own recovery, and safe for everyone to share without fear of interruption, judgment, or ridicule.
- They establish boundaries to provide mutual protection, growth, and recovery by encouraging us to practice our recovery skills during meetings.
- They help keep the focus on the principles of the program, not individual personalities

Examples of guidelines:

- When sharing, limit excessive focus on details as this may be part of the disease of codependency, enabling us to avoid our feelings. One helpful way to share in CoDA is to take just a few sentences to explain a situation, followed by more sharing of what you learned & what came up for you. Details can be shared with a sponsor, friend, or professional.
- Limit the use of profanity
- Keep our sharing within the allotted time to allow everyone the opportunity to share
- Refrain from using specific religious names and, instead, simply use "Higher Power" or "God" (as this is a spiritual program, not a religious program)
- Do not assume that we know what is true for anyone other than ourselves. In recovery, we work toward taking responsibility for our own lives rather than focusing on others.
- When sharing, keep the focus on YOU...your feelings, thoughts, and actions; your experience, strength, and hope; your challenges and successes. Share with others what you have learned in your current and past relationships. We encourage the use of "I" statements as a way of focusing the speaker's attention on their own personal experience. Using the word "you" or "they" rather than "I" can be a way to avoid owning our individual reality. One example of crosstalk could be, "When you get a cold, you should take vitamins." An appropriate way to express the same thing would be, "I've found vitamins to be helpful when I have a cold."
- Sometimes in our meetings there may be periods of silence. We try to use that time to pay attention to our feelings and ourselves.

- We encourage newcomers to begin slowly and carefully. Nothing that is shared is unimportant or stupid.
- If you have any questions concerning CoDA, please wait until after the end of the meeting and one of the members will be glad to answer them.
- If you wish to give feedback to anyone after the meeting, please first ask that person for their permission.
- If a group member feels someone is engaging in crosstalk at a meeting, it is hoped that they will inform the person in a safe and courteous manner, gently reminding them of the guidelines.

Ways to address crosstalk during a meeting?

Many of us came into CoDA not knowing how to take care of ourselves, maintain boundaries, or deal with conflict without either aggression or avoidance. The feelings brought up by crosstalk can be intense and distressing, but they can also serve as an opportunity to practice the program.

Addressing crosstalk does not come easily for many of us. We don't want to embarrass people, hurt their feelings, cause them to think less of us, or scare them away. We hope someone else will speak up! As recovering codependents, we are faced with the apparent paradox of taking care of ourselves and the group by maintaining our no crosstalk boundary, while at the same time not trying to manipulate or control. There ARE healthy and loving ways to uphold the no crosstalk boundary, and it is helpful to discuss options with your group.

- Is it the responsibility of the meeting leader or of the person that noticed the crosstalk?
- Is it best to address during the share, immediately after the share, or after the meeting?
- Examples of language/statements that can be used to address crosstalk with love and respect?