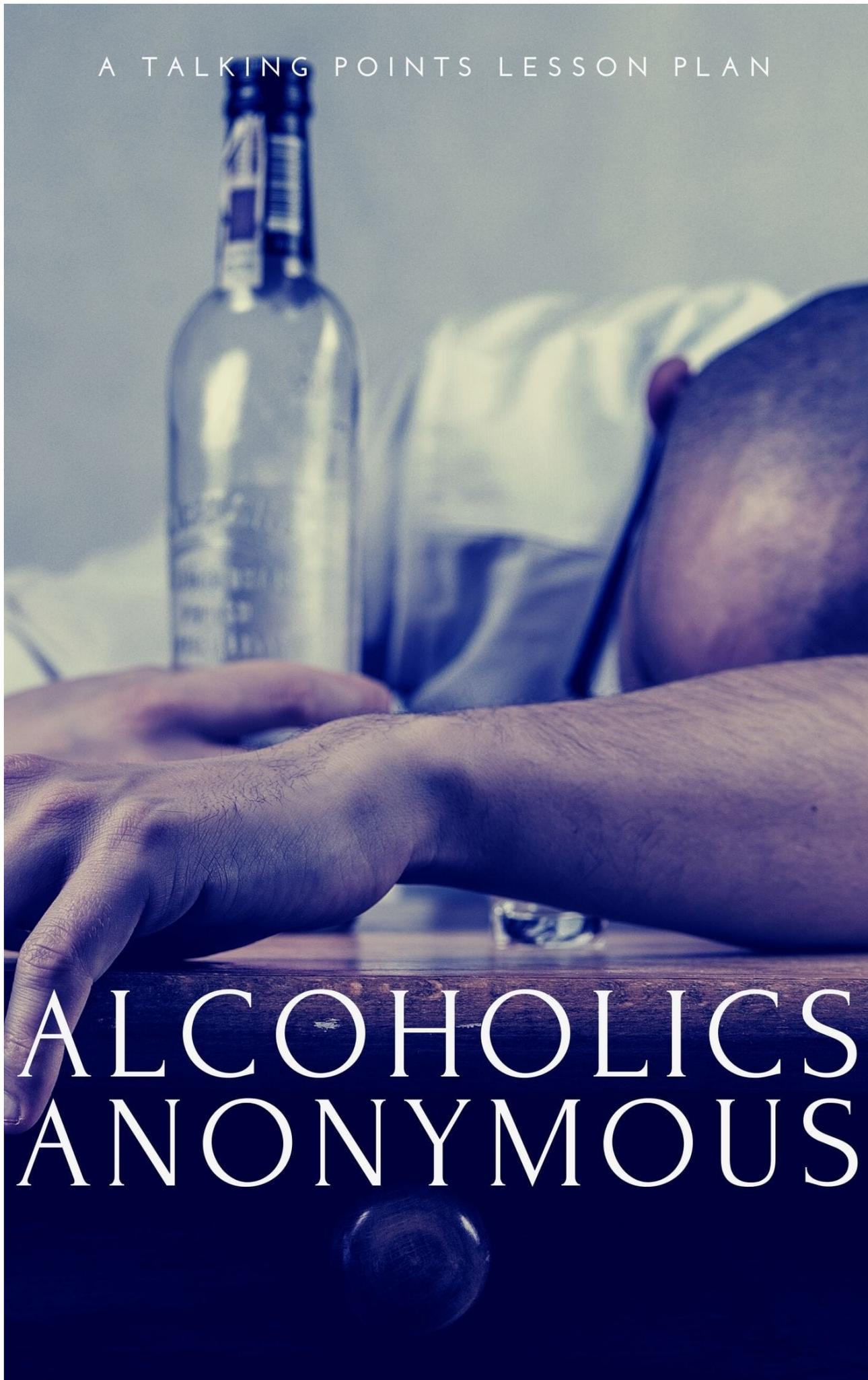


A TALKING POINTS LESSON PLAN



# ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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# Introduction

- What is AA?
- Do you have AA in your country?
- What do you think of this organisation?

# Reading

*Read William's story below:*

My drinking had reached a point where it was out of control.

I was drinking every day, and I didn't know what else to do. I had run into trouble with my job, with my family — but most importantly with my wife and kids.

My wife told me that unless I sorted out my drinking, she would have no choice but to leave me.

One look on her face and I could tell that she was dead serious.

At first, I said I would stop drinking by myself. I had tried that before, but I had always gone back to the bottle again.

So my wife left a pamphlet from the local AA group in the living room. A subtle way for me to consider going to an AA meeting.

I read it, then left it on the table.

I didn't need AA. The people that went there were real alcoholics. They were down-and-outs. The kind of people that get into trouble with the police. The kind of people that lose their jobs and family.

That's when my wife that is exactly what is happening to me.

I was dead against going. I argued with my wife, pleaded with her. I made promises. Promises I knew I could not keep.

But she insisted.

She said she would come with me if I really wanted her to.

I didn't want her to go to a meeting with me. It would be bad enough just me going.

In the end, I called the number on the pamphlet.

I was terrified when I made the call. My hands were shaking and my voice was cracking.

But the person on the other end of the phone — a woman — she made it sound perfectly normal.

Just come to a meeting, she said. Just come. And listen.

So I did.

I went there, and it was nothing how I expected it to be.

We weren't in a church basement. I wasn't surrounded by a group of dishevelled middle-aged

men. There was no hand-wringing and no tears.

There was a real cross-section of people. A teacher. A woman that worked in advertising. A young man who looked like he was in perfect health. Just a real mixed bag of people.

In that first meeting, people told stories, they spoke of their experiences with alcohol.

The young man shared a story of when he was drinking and he got locked out of his house. And his attempt to break into his own home.

He had us all laughing in our seats!

I had never done this, but I could relate to what he was talking about. I could understand the thinking behind it.

I left that first meeting with a few phone numbers.

Call me anytime, said the woman who chaired the meeting.

Give me a buzz, said the young man. We can go and grab a coffee somewhere.

That was six weeks ago.

I am still a very new member of AA, but I go to meetings every week — at least five meetings a week.

And my wife is happy.

We both know there is a long road ahead, but we also know that I am making progress.

# Reading Comprehension Questions

- What was William doing every day?
- Who had he had trouble with in his life?
- What did his wife say to him?
- What was William's first plan?
- What went wrong with this method?
- What did his wife leave for him to read?
- Did William read it?
- What was William's initial feeling about the people that go to AA?
- Did William argue with his wife about AA?
- Did his wife want to go to AA?
- How did William feel when he called AA?
- What did the woman on the phone say to him?
- Describe William's first AA meeting. What kind of people did he see?
- Who told a funny story?
- Did William get people's contact details?
- How long ago was William's first meeting?
- How does he feel now?

# Essential Vocabulary

out of control	run into trouble	dead serious
pamphlet	subtle	consider
alcoholics	down-and-outs	dead against
argued	pleaded	insisted
terrified	shaking	cracking
other end of the phone	perfectly normal	church basement
surrounded	dishevelled	middle-aged
hand-wringing	tears	cross-section
advertising	perfect health	mixed-bag
experiences	alcohol	locked out
attempt	break into	relate
chaired	give me a buzz	grab a coffee
member	long road ahead	making progress

## Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

**Notebook**—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

***“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”***

## Discussion Questions

How bad do you think William's drinking was before?

What kind of trouble do you think he had with his job?

What kind of trouble do you think he had with his family?

How about with his wife?

Why was William so nervous to make the telephone call?

Why do you think William didn't want his wife to go to a meeting?

What kind of things do you think the people talked about in the meeting?

Why were people laughing at the young man's story?

Do you think William can get better?

Do you know anyone who is an alcoholic?

What can anyone do to help an alcoholic?

Do you have AA in your country?

What do you think of this kind of organisation?

Do you have pity for alcoholics? Or not? Why/why not?

Is there a cure for alcoholics? What is it?

Do you think you could become an alcoholic? Why/why not?

# Role Play

**This is a role play exercise.**

There are two characters in this role play.

## **William**

You are William in the story at the beginning of the lesson.

You drink too much alcohol, and you are worried about it. It is making problems for you at work, with your family and now with your wife and children.

You don't know what to do.

You are talking to a good friend who you trust about this. And you hope your friend can give you some answers.

## **William's Friend**

You are a good friend of William.

You have known William for a long time, and it is well-known that he drinks too much.

He sometimes makes a fool of himself at parties or at family get together events.

You want to help William, but you have to choose your words very carefully. You don't want to shame him, but you do want him to realise that his drinking is out of control.

In pairs, work on your role play.

***When you are ready, show the class.***

# Debate: Alcoholism in Our Neighbourhood

**This is a debate exercise.**

Divide the class into two equal-size teams. Then select a chairperson — this person should chair the debate and make sure everyone has a fair chance of speaking. They should also control the debate so things don't get too rowdy or out of control.

## The Situation

It has been found that there are a large number of people in your town or city that drink too much alcohol.

Many people miss days off work, but there are more serious cases of drunk-driving and fighting because of people drinking too much.

As a result of this, an idea has been put forward to start an alcohol awareness and treatment centre.

This centre will occupy a building in the outskirts of town and there will be a regular team of trained staff to help people suffering from alcoholism.

Of course, there will be running costs such as rent, utilities and staff salaries. But many people believe this could provide valuable help for people suffering from alcohol addiction issues.

## Team A

You think this is a great idea!

You have seen first-hand some people in the centre of town that clearly have alcohol problems. You have also heard stories of people that have issues with alcohol.

Alcoholism is a definite problem in the town and needs to be addressed.

Giving the people somewhere to go to get professional care and treatment is a great advantage to the whole town.

## Team B

You really dislike the idea of this...

You agree that alcoholism is a problem in the town — and it must be addressed. But the problem lies with the individual, not the whole community of the town.

Each person who suffers from alcohol problems must address these issues by themselves. They must take responsibility for their addiction to alcohol and take the right steps to get healthy.

There are plenty of books to read about alcoholism in the library and a wealth of information online.

What do we need an alcoholism centre in town for?

In your teams, get together and discuss what points you can put forward. Try to think of strong lines of argument that you can say in the debate.

You should also think about what the other team is likely to say so you can have a counter-argument against their points.

***When you are ready — begin the debate!***

# AA Stories

Look at the following stories that members of an AA meeting shared with others.

Take turns reading each story out loud and then discuss what each person said.

## Kevin

I started drinking because all my friends did. I grew up in a small town and every Friday and Saturday night we would all go out drinking without fail.

It became a very strong part of my life.

By the time I was in my late twenties, I was drinking every night without fail. I would go to the pub every Friday and Saturday night — plus another couple of nights midweek.

But every night at home I would drink too. I always had alcohol in the house. Beer in the fridge and hard liquor on the shelf.

Anytime anyone came round, I would offer them a drink — but never tea or coffee. Always booze.

It got to a point where I was drinking at lunchtimes. Then all day on Saturday and Sunday.

I got fired from my job and that was when I started going to AA.

I've been going regularly since then, and it has changed my life.

I don't know what I would do without AA.

## Mark

I am an alcoholic — that much is definitely true.

But I have reached a point where I think nothing and nobody can help me. I have been drinking since I was 14 years old. I am now 58, so that is 44 years of drinking.

I have tried to stop many times, but each time I fail. I just go back to the bottle every time.

I have lost countless jobs and got divorced. My kids refuse to talk to me. My family has nothing to do with me anymore.

I went to AA, but I hated it. All the references to god... I couldn't stand it.

So I left and never went back.

The last time I tried to get sober was about ten years ago. I have just given up and now I am just waiting for the inevitable.

## Cindy

I drank alcohol throughout my twenties — but I was never a falling-down drunk. In fact, most of the time I just didn't like the taste of it. I certainly didn't like waking up with a huge hangover.

Then I got married and had two children. Life was good.

But I don't know what happened. One day I woke up and I felt really down. I thought it was just one of those days. But the next day was like that, and the next.

I started drinking to help me deal with feeling so down in the dumps.

A few years later, the two boys were going to school. At this point, my husband would go to work, the boys would get on the bus for school and I would be left alone in the house.

I would drink all day while sitting in the living room with the curtains closed.

My husband noticed this, of course, and he gave me an ultimatum — Get sober or lose everything.

At first, I resisted. I argued with him and cried and yelled at him.

But in the end, I saw that my life was out of control.

I went to AA. The first time was terrifying.

But I have been going to meetings for six years now, and it was the best decision I ever made.

## **Philip**

I've been coming to AA for two weeks now.

I was ordered to come here by the judge. I had to go to court because I got involved in a traffic accident a while back.

The police did a blood test at the station and they found that my alcohol levels were very high.

Yes, I had been drinking, but I was not drunk — no matter what anyone says.

Anyway, I have to come to AA meetings for another four weeks and then I am done. I am only coming here because I have no choice — and to keep the wife quiet.

As soon as the time is up, I shall stop coming. It's a total waste of time.

Just a bunch of losers that can't take care of themselves.

Take turns to read parts of the stories above in class.

Then get into groups of four students and discuss all the stories.

Think about the following questions:

- Why did this person start drinking?
- Do you think they will stay sober for the rest of their life? Why/why not?
- What was the 'wake-up call' for them?
- Was AA their only hope? What other methods could they have used to stop drinking?
- What does each person's family and friends think of them drinking?
- Are they a better person for not drinking? Why so?

***When you are all ready, discuss each story together in class.***

# The AA Meeting

**This is a role play activity for the whole class.**

In this activity, you should all arrange your chairs in a circle. You are going to have an AA meeting.

In the meeting, there should be one person to chair the meeting. This person encourages other people to speak and share their stories.

The other people are all ex-alcoholics in various stages of sobriety — some have been sober for many years, others have been sober for just a short time.

In the meeting, everyone should try to tell a story or share their experiences when drinking.

The other people should be very sympathetic and offer helpful words or advice or sympathy.

***You should try to show empathy in the activity!***

# Writing

**This is a letter-writing exercise.**

Imagine you are a person with a serious addiction to alcohol.

You have decided that you need help. So you write to a close family member or friend explaining your situation.

You need to relate in your letter your experiences with alcohol, maybe tell a story of something that has happened to you and how this has made you reach a crisis point.

Ask the friend or family member for help.

You should try to be as sincere as possible in your letter!

***When you finish writing your letter, show it to your teacher — or take turns reading your letters out in class.***

# Teacher's Notes

*This is a lesson on alcoholism and the effects of drinking too much. It may only be suitable for older students.*

## **Introduction**

Go through all the questions and ask the students. Elicit as many responses as you can. If you are a foreign teacher working abroad, you might want to add one or two comments of your own about homelessness in your country to try to get more responses from the students.

## **Reading**

Pick a few students to read through all the text. You might need to read through twice, but hopefully, the students are at the right level where they can pick up most of the meaning.

## **Reading Comprehension Questions**

You can do this by going through all the questions as one group with all the class. Or you could put the students in small groups. Or let them do the whole exercise individually.

## **Essential Vocabulary**

This is a list of vocabulary that may be very useful to your students.

You can do this for homework or as an in-class activity.

For either purpose, I would suggest doing the following:

- Look the word or phrase up in a dictionary
- Write down the meaning of the new word in the students' vocabulary notebook
- Think of a sentence using the new word

You could do this as a class activity for the first four or five words, then assign the rest as homework. Students often need to practice using a dictionary, so this could be a useful exercise for them.

## **Discussion Questions**

This is a class activity.

Go round the class and ask the students all the discussion questions one by one. Their answers and responses may encourage further or follow-up questions.

The point is for the students to become active in discussing what they have read and the vocabulary they have gained.

## **Role Play**

This is a simple role play exercise for two people.

The two characters are self-explanatory in the exercise. Divide the class into pairs and give them some time to prepare.

When they are ready, all the class should show their role plays. Use what people say in their role plays for discussion after the activity.

## **Debate**

This is a debate activity. You should divide the class into two groups of equal number. You also need a chairperson to chair the debate. You can either choose one yourself, elect one, or ask for a

volunteer.

Go through all the debate conditions for each group and give each group some time to come up with strong arguments for and against the showers.

Then begin the debate.

Ideally, you should take a very passive part in this activity. The students should lead the entire activity.

Make note of the points each group presents and after the activity, you can use these points for discussion as one class.

### **AA Stories**

This is another reading and speaking exercise.

Get the students to read out the stories in the exercise. Clarify any unclear points and check for comprehension. You might have to help the students with some of the vocabulary.

After reading all the stories, then divide the class into groups of four students.

Each group should discuss each of the characters in the stories and their experience with AA. They should also answer the questions with as much detail as possible.

You should go round the room to assist where necessary.

### **The AA Meeting**

This a role play activity for the whole class.

Arrange the students sitting in chairs in a circle. One person should chair the meeting. Then each person should share a story about their life with alcohol and what problems they encountered.

The others should offer words of sympathy and also give advice when they can.

There might be the temptation to laugh in this activity — but students should try to deal with this as seriously as they can!

### **Writing**

This is very straightforward. The students just have to write a letter as detailed in the exercise.

# Credits

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