

Welcome Newcomer!

May we suggest:

- Attend at least one meeting every week
- Talk to Al-Anon members between meetings
- Find a Sponsor
- Read Al-Anon literature daily
- Subscribe to Al-Anon's monthly magazine, *The Forum*
- Volunteer to help your new group through service
- Visit our website at al-anon.org



Al-Anon may be listed in your telephone directory

For information about other Al-Anon meetings near you, call:
1-888-4AL-ANON

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.

Suggested Al-Anon Preamble to the Twelve Steps

Al-Anon/Alateen is supported by members' voluntary contributions and from the sale of our Conference Approved Literature.

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Approved by
World Service Conference
Al-Anon Family Groups

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can
and wisdom to know the difference.

Reflecting on each thought in the Serenity Prayer can help put situations into a clearer perspective.

*We invite you to ask
questions and to
Keep Coming Back*

Please use these phone contacts:

Local Meetings:

What Do YOU Do about the Alcoholic's Drinking?

RECOVERY

What do YOU do about the Alcoholic's drinking?

Many of us who are close to an alcoholic have felt, at times, that somehow we were to blame for the problem drinking. We aren't. However, our determined, angry, or fearful efforts to do something about it or the problems resulting from it can make matters worse. In fact, many Al-Anon members have learned, "A drinking problem in the house can often be more easily recognized by the behavior of those living with the drinker than by that of the drinker."

It seems that no matter what we try, seldom are we able to make lasting improvements. Still, we persist in our futile efforts. After years of countless painful experiences, we in Al-Anon have come to realize that some of our attitudes and behaviors, though fairly common, are not helpful.

In looking back at our efforts to deal with the problem drinking of someone close to us, we found that many of us have tried a number of the following. Perhaps you, too, have tried a few of them.

We who live, or have lived, with active alcoholism have probably . . .

- Made excuses for the alcoholic drinking.
- Tried to keep up appearances, making sure the alcoholics looked presentable.
- Been sure to wake them in time for work, school, or other commitments; called to make excuses when they couldn't make it.
- Covered up for them to the neighbors, relatives, and friends.
- Made every effort to get food into them.
- Stayed at home to keep out of sight of other people.
- Gone out as often as possible to get away from it all.

We may have . . .

- Done all the chores around the house.
- Supplemented or earned all the income.
- Paid the alcoholic's bills, as well as our own.
- Controlled all the finances, or at least as much as we could get our hands on.
- Found employment for them, or helped them with their work.

Some of us may have . . .

- Tried drinking with them, so that they wouldn't get so intoxicated.
- Encouraged them to try controlled drinking, and then monitored their efforts.
- Encouraged them to drink at home, so they wouldn't get into trouble.
- Cleaned up when they vomited or worse; complained about it; then cleaned and complained again and again.

Others of us have . . .

- Told them to get out, so we wouldn't have to look at them; then sent the children to bring them home.
- Gone out to look for them ourselves, or telephoned around to find them.
- Told them not to yell at or hit the children, then yelled at or hit the children ourselves.
- Complained that they didn't love us; denied it when they made the same complaint about us.

Many of us have . . .

- Loudly and bitterly resented the money spent on alcohol, then bought more, or given them money to buy more alcohol.
- Poured the alcohol down the sink.
- Blamed the drinking on their job.
- Blamed it on their friends or the people they work with.
- Denied that alcoholism was the cause of the problems, and blamed them on everything else.

We may have . . .

- Consoled the alcoholics when they felt sorry for themselves.
- Told them not to feel so sorry for themselves.
- Used sex as a weapon to control them.
- Refused to sleep with them; slept with them.
- Kept on having children with them.
- Cheated on them because they cheated on us.

We might have . . .

- Lied about the amount of money we owed or had on hand.
- Run up bills so they wouldn't have enough left to spend on alcohol.
- Tried to tie up the drinker's free time so there wouldn't be time to drink.
- Bought all kinds of games and equipment trying to get them interested in something besides drinking.
- Felt offended when the novelty wore off and they went back to drinking.

Practically all of us have . . .

- Worried over them.
- Cried over them.
- Given them the silent treatment.
- Chased them out of the house.
- Tried to reason with them.
- Done everything we could to please them.
- Walked on egg shells around them.
- Hidden from them.
- Waited on them; made them wait on themselves.
- Told them to telephone, and argued with them when they did.
- Threatened to leave for good; failed to carry out the threat.

- Called the police, gone to court with charges of assault, and then withdrawn the charges.
- Kept ourselves and our homes spotless.
- Let ourselves and our homes fall apart.
- Refused to take another beating.
- Taken another beating--and another.
- Beat them.
- Begged them not to drive when drunk.
- Gotten them out of jams that resulted from their drinking.

We have . . .

- Loved them and wanted them to love us.
- Hated them.
- Hated their friends or relatives.
- Tried to get help for them.
- Prayed they would quit drinking.
- Prayed they would drink themselves to death.
- Hoped they would break their necks before we did it for them.
- Planned their funerals.

And finally . . .

We may have forced them out of our homes or left home ourselves hoping to compel them to take action about their drinking.

Can you see how completely useless all these maneuvers are?

Do you see that this is not the sane and consistent behavior that is needed to face this serious problem?

It is a sad truth that the people who care most about a problem drinker often do more harm than good. By our own actions, we might actually help to prolong the drinking years and the agony that goes with them.

But there is a way out. Although many of us have reacted in self-defeating ways to the disease of alcoholism, we found that by changing our own attitudes, we could find serenity and a satisfying way of life.

You can, too. You can help yourself and your loved ones by learning a better way to face the problem of alcoholism.

Here are some steps you can take today.

- Accept the fact that there is a problem with alcohol, and that you can learn to deal with it.
- Recognize that you have a right to dignity and a decent life.
- Remember that many of the things said and done in anger, frustration, or despair may make matters worse.
- Be aware that each of us can truly change only ourselves.
- Attend Al-Anon meetings to find out how we deal with situations similar to yours.

You can find help.

Al-Anon Family Groups is an important source of help for anyone affected by someone else's drinking. Al-Anon groups are made up of family members and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other.

By regularly attending and participating in Al-Anon meetings you will find healthy, positive ways of dealing with the difficulties that result from another's alcoholism.

Even if the alcoholic continues to drink, his or her relatives and friends can achieve serenity as a result of Al-Anon.

Look for the "Al-Anon" listing in your local telephone directory, and call to find a meeting near you.

DO YOU Love an Alcoholic

*Take Courage
There Is Hope*

RECOVERY

Alcoholism is an illness

The first thing to acknowledge, believe, and *accept* is that alcoholics suffer from a real sickness—a sickness which affects all those close to them.

The American Medical Association and many other authorities the world over declare that alcoholics suffer from an illness over which they have no control. Alcoholism is not caused by weakness of will, immorality, or a desire to hurt others.

Scientific advances in the understanding of this disease have redefined old ideas based on superstition, ignorance, and prejudice. The success of this approach is proven by the powerful evidence of many thousands of recoveries in Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, and Alateen.

By accepting the idea that alcoholism is an illness from which problem drinkers and those who care about them *can* find release, you will have no reason to be ashamed of alcoholism—no reason to fear it.

Learn the facts

Wipe your mental slate clean of everything you *think* you know about alcoholism. Then apply yourself to learning about the disease.

Read everything available about the disease of alcoholism. A vast amount of information is accessible through public libraries and the Internet.

Attending open meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous can provide valuable first-hand knowledge about alcoholism from recovering alcoholics themselves. Open meetings can be attended by anyone interested in the problem of alcoholism. A.A. is usually listed in the telephone directory.

Help yourself now

Don't wait to seek help. Anyone who has suffered from the effects of someone else's drinking faces constant emotional strains and pressures, and needs help in relieving these. You will find relief, understanding, support, and warmhearted help in an Al-Anon Family Group. There you will, as one member put it, "learn to live again."

The Al-Anon Family Groups, Al-Anon and Alateen, are wives, husbands, parents, partners, children, and other relatives and friends of alcoholics. With nearly 26,000 groups worldwide, there may be one close by. The members are compassionate, well-informed, and have first-hand knowledge of problems just like yours, because they have had them, too!

Al-Anon may be listed in the telephone directory. If not, call A.A., the local alcoholism information services, or our toll free number.

Don't hesitate to attend because you feel you're a stranger; anyone who feels his or her life may have been affected by someone else's drinking is welcome.

Talk to members before and after the meeting; discuss your difficulties with the members there. Conversations with Al-Anon members who share similar problems will help you accept that alcoholism is a disease. Sharing this knowledge can help you begin your own recovery.

Some important "Do's" and "Don'ts"

If the alcoholic in your life is still actively drinking, learning what not to do is an important part of the Al-Anon program. Replacing these behaviors with more positive ones is equally important.

- Don't treat the alcoholic like a child; consider this person as if he or she were suffering from any other disease.
- Do attend Al-Anon meetings regularly and find a group where you feel comfortable.
- Don't check up to see how much the alcoholic is

- Do reach out for help in-between meetings by calling members and reading Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL) daily.
- Don't nag the alcoholic about the drinking. Never argue while he or she is under the influence of alcohol.
- Do remember that we can't control, cause, or cure alcoholism.
- Don't preach, scold, or enter into quarrels with the alcoholic.
- Do attend at least six meetings before deciding if Al-Anon is right for you.

Following these suggestions can bring about a more comfortable frame of mind. All these *Do's and Don'ts* have good sound reasons that grew out of many members' experiences.

Alcoholics suffer from feelings of guilt beyond anything the nonalcoholic can imagine. Reminding them of failures, neglect of family and friends, and social errors is all wasted effort. It only makes the situation worse.

The "if you loved me" approach is likewise futile. Remember that alcoholism is compulsive in nature and cannot be controlled by willpower.

Equally useless are promises, coaxing, arguments, and threats. *Don't threaten unless you are prepared to carry out your threat.*

Guard against a self-righteous, superior attitude. Hostility and contempt cannot cure an illness and may keep us from becoming the type of person we are striving to be.

Sometimes a crisis—the loss of a job, an accident, or an arrest—can convince the alcoholic of the need for help. Coddling and overprotection at such time will not be helpful. The crisis may be necessary to recovery.

Do nothing to prevent such a crisis from happening—don't cover bad checks, pay overdue bills, or go to the boss with excuses. The suffering you are trying to ease by such actions may be the very thing needed to bring the alcoholic to a realization of the seriousness of the situations.

If the alcoholic asks for help

Often the first sign of an alcoholic's desire to stop drinking comes at the end of a desperate and hopeless period. It may come during the remorse of a hangover, or it may be precipitated by a crisis.

Then your knowledge of alcoholism and your wiser attitudes toward the alcoholic developed in Al-Anon will be of great help. To the desperate question, "What shall I do?" simply say ample help is available. If asked for suggestions, you can be specific, mentioning A.A. and other sources of help you may have found.

Remember, though, that this outcome cannot be forced and might not ever occur. The alcoholic must be ready for help before he or she can be helped. Don't even insist the drinker use the word "alcoholic." Even such a phrase as "I might have a drinking problem" may mean acknowledgment of the need for help.

When it is clear the alcoholic wants help, a talk with an A.A. member may be the next step—not requested by you, however, but by the alcoholic.

Whatever course of action is decided upon, the decision must be the alcoholic's—it should be plainly understood that he or she is taking the step freely.

At this time, you can help yourself by staying in close contact with Al-Anon members and your group. Al-Anon can continue to help, whether the alcoholic eventually stops drinking or not.

The road back

For those alcoholics who do embrace the A.A. program, the recuperation time may be difficult. Constantly keep in mind that "Easy Does It." Don't expect immediate, complete recovery for the drinker or the family. Alcoholism, the illness, took a long time to develop; convalescence is a slow process, too. There may be what are known as "dry drunks," emotional tensions in the alcoholic that have nothing to do with the actual drinking. Be patient. At such times you may think things are worse than they were in the drinking days, but they're not. Patience and tolerance will help these trying times pass.

Extreme fatigue for a year or more after drinking stops may be one of the symptoms of the drinker's withdrawal from alcohol. Don't try to force things. Plan your own activities and continue to go to Al-Anon meetings.

Don't be overprotective. Recovering alcoholics need to learn to live in a world where alcohol is served and answer for themselves.

Guard against feelings of jealousy or resentment about the method of recovery chosen. Many alcoholics need daily AA meetings; just remember it is treatment



even when it means he or she is away from home to receive help.

As the alcoholic gets rid of old drinking friends, habits, and haunts, there will be time for other enthusiasms, including A.A. Be encouraging of change. When you begin finding interesting activities for yourself in Al-Anon, it takes the focus off the alcoholic and you become responsible for your own happiness. Both of you will be on the way to a new life together, each in your own way.

Everyone may have slips and setbacks; don't take these seriously. Believe that a firm foundation for recovery has been laid. If you feel that either of you has made mistakes, learn from them and forget them. Let go of the disappointments and setbacks and push forward!

The way ahead is not always easy, but it can be full of rich rewards. Recovery from the effects of alcoholism is possible. Al-Anon can help.

Understanding Ourselves and Alcoholism

RECOVERY

Understanding Alcoholism

What Is Alcoholism?

The American Medical Association recognizes alcoholism as a disease that can be arrested but not cured. One of the symptoms is an uncontrollable desire to drink. Alcoholism is a progressive illness. As long as alcoholics continue to drink, their drive to drink will get worse. If not dealt with, the disease can result in insanity or death. The only method of arresting alcoholism is total abstinence. Most authorities agree that even after years of sobriety, alcoholics can never drink again, because alcoholism is a lifetime disease.

There are many successful treatments for alcoholism today. Alcoholics Anonymous is the best known, and widely regarded as the most effective. Alcoholism is no longer a hopeless condition, if it is recognized and treated.

Who Are Alcoholics?

All kinds of people are alcoholics—people from all walks of life. Only a small percentage of alcoholics fit the stereotype of “derelict” or “bum,” panhandling on the streets. Most alcoholics appear to be functioning

lives. Their family life, their social life, or their work may suffer. It might be all three. Alcoholics are people whose drinking causes a continuing and growing problem in any area of their lives.

Why Do Alcoholics Drink?

Alcoholics drink because they think they have to. They use alcohol as a crutch and an escape. They are in emotional pain and use alcohol to kill that pain. Eventually they depend on alcohol so much that they become convinced they can't live without it. This is *obsession*.

When some alcoholics try to do without alcohol, the withdrawal symptoms are so overwhelming that they go back to drinking because drinking seems to be the only way to get rid of the agony. This is *addiction*.

Most alcoholics would like to be social drinkers. They spend a lot of time and effort trying to control their drinking so they will be able to drink like other people. They may try drinking on weekends or drinking only a certain drink. But they can never be sure of being able to stop drinking when they want. They end up getting drunk even when they promised themselves they wouldn't. This is *compulsion*.

It is the nature of this disease that alcoholics do not believe they are ill. This is *denial*. Hope for recovery lies in their ability to recognize a need for help, their desire to stop drinking, and their willingness to admit that they cannot cope with the problem by themselves.

Taken from *Alateen—Hope for Children of Alcoholics* (B-3)
"Understanding Alcoholism"

Understanding Ourselves

Families and Friends Are Affected

Alcoholism is a family disease. Compulsive drinking affects the drinker and it affects the drinker's relationships. Friendships, employment, childhood, parenthood, love affairs, and marriages all suffer from the effects of alcoholism. Those special relationships in which a person is really close to an alcoholic are affected most, and we who *care* are the most caught up in the behavior of another person. We react to an alcoholic's behavior. Seeing that the drinking is out of hand, we try to control it. We are ashamed of the public scenes but try to handle it in private. It isn't long before we feel we are to blame and take on the hurts, the fears,

and the guilt of an alcoholic. We, too, can become ill.

Even well-meaning people often begin to count the number of drinks another person is having. We may pour expensive liquor down drains, search the house for hidden bottles, or listen for the sound of opening cans. All our thinking becomes directed at what the alcoholic is doing or not doing and how to get the drinker to stop drinking. This is our *obsession*.

Watching fellow human beings slowly kill themselves with alcohol is painful. While alcoholics don't seem to worry about the bills, the job, the children, or the condition of their health, the people around them usually begin to worry. We often make the mistake of covering up. We try to fix everything, make excuses, tell little lies to mend damaged relationships, and worry some more. This is our *anxiety*.

Sooner or later the alcoholic's behavior makes other people angry. As we realize that the alcoholic is telling lies, using us, and not taking care of responsibilities, we may begin to feel that the alcoholic doesn't love us. We often want to strike back, punish, and make the alcoholic pay for the hurt and frustration caused by uncontrolled drinking. This is our *anger*.

Sometimes those who are close to the alcoholic begin to pretend. We accept promises and trust the alcoholic. Each time there is a sober period, however brief, we want to believe the problem has gone away forever. When good sense tells us there is something wrong with the alcoholic's drinking and thinking, we still hide how we feel and what we know. This is our *denial*.

Perhaps the most severe damage to those of us who have shared some part of life with an alcoholic comes in the form of the nagging belief that we are somehow at fault. We may feel it was something we did or did not do—that we were not good enough, not attractive enough, or not clever enough to have solved this problem for the one we love. These are our *feelings of guilt*.

Help and Hope

We who have turned to Al-Anon have often done so in despair, unable to believe in the possibility of change and unable to go on as we have before. We feel cheated out of a loving companion, over-burdened with responsibilities, unwanted, unloved, and alone. There are times when some of us can act arrogant, smug, self-righteous, and dominating. We come to Al-Anon, however, because we want and need help.

While we may have been driven to Al-Anon by the effects of someone else's drinking, we soon come to know that our own thinking has to change before we can make a new and successful approach to living. It is in Al-Anon that we learn to deal with our obsession, our anxiety, our anger, our denial, and our feelings of guilt. It is through the fellowship that we ease our emotional burdens by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with others. Little by little, we come to realize at our meetings that much of our discomfort comes from our attitudes. We begin to change these attitudes and learn about our responsibilities to ourselves. We discover feelings of self-worth and love, and we grow spiritually. The emphasis begins to be lifted from the alcoholic and placed where we do have some power—over our own lives.

Information for the Newcomer

RECOVERY

Strength and hope for friends and families of problem drinkers

Al-Anon is a "One Day at a Time" program. It's impossible to understand everything about the program in one day, but every day is an opportunity to move forward on a path of recovery from the effects of the family illness of alcoholism.

One way to begin is to answer some of the questions that are most commonly asked by newcomers.

How will it help me?

Our personal situations may be different, but we share as equals because of what we have in common: our lives have been affected by another person's drinking.

Al-Anon is a mutual support group. We can find understanding and support when we share our common experience with each other.

Some of us are here because a spouse or partner has struggled with alcoholism. For others, the problem drinker is a parent, child, or grandchild. Sometimes a brother, a sister, or some other friend or relative brings us to Al-Anon.

Many of us have had more than one alcoholic family

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Many of us have had more than one alcoholic family

member or friend. Alcoholism has similar effects on us all, even though our relationships to the alcoholic may be different.

Many newcomers are most interested in hearing about situations and relationships that are similar to their own. Over time, however, we come to understand that we can benefit from hearing how the Al-Anon principles worked in many different circumstances.

Do I have to talk in front of a group?

There is no obligation to speak at an Al-Anon meeting. Some newcomers are ready to talk right away because their problems weigh on them so heavily. Others may prefer to listen.

Al-Anon members become more comfortable in sharing their personal experiences as they begin to understand that the meeting is a safe place. Members listen to each other without criticizing, passing judgment, or giving direction. There are no right or wrong answers. All share as peers, and every member is listened to with courtesy and respect.

What if I see someone who knows me from work, church, or some other part of my life? Will they start talking to me about Al-Anon there?

It's possible that you could see someone you already know at an Al-Anon meeting. There are so many of us who have been affected by someone else's drinking.

If you recognize someone, remember that everyone comes to Al-Anon meetings for the same reason: they are seeking recovery from the effects of someone else's drinking.

The Al-Anon program has a principle of anonymity. That means that who is at the meeting—and what is said at the meeting—is not shared with anyone outside of the meeting, even other family members.

Membership in other groups or organizations is not discussed during Al-Anon meetings. Al-Anon members maintain their own anonymity, and respect their fellow members' anonymity.

Is Al-Anon a religious fellowship?

Al-Anon is a spiritual program. It is not allied with any religion or religious denomination. Religious belief, or the lack of it, is a personal choice and not a subject

for discussion at an Al-Anon meeting, which focuses solely on issues related to alcoholism.

Some Al-Anon groups meet at rooms located in a church, but those Al-Anon groups are not affiliated with that church in any way. These meetings are open to everyone who is concerned about the effects of alcoholism, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Alternative locations may be available to people who are uncomfortable meeting in a church. Some Al-Anon meetings take place at schools and hospitals, among other locations.

Does Al-Anon have professional counselors or therapists? Can Al-Anon recommend treatment centers?

Al-Anon is a mutual support group, made of peers who share their insights and experiences as equals. Al-Anon does not offer opinion on medical treatment, therapy, counseling, or professional services of any kind.

Some Al-Anon members seek professional treatment or support for a variety of reasons, but that is a personal decision and not a subject for discussion at an Al-Anon meeting.

Who is responsible for leading the group?

Al-Anon groups are led by the group members who rotate leadership. They elect officers to serve for short periods of time, perhaps three months to a year, though Group Representatives usually serve for a three-year term. Members give service to Al-Anon as part of their recovery program, volunteering to lead meetings, set up the room, display the literature, and fill other group needs.

Are there other groups like this?

There are more than 25,000 Al-Anon Family Groups in over 130 countries. There may be several different groups that meet regularly in your community, or nearby.

Every Al-Anon group has its own personality and tone. The groups follow the spiritual principles in Al-Anon's Twelve Traditions. After visiting several different Al-Anon groups, you'll see which meetings will

best meet your needs.

Most group members are happy to provide their contact information as a resource and to answer newcomers' questions. Some groups offer a contact list, with names, phone numbers, and sometimes e-mail addresses of members you can communicate with between meetings.

What is a "home group?"

Many Al-Anon members, even those who attend more than one meeting per week, consider one particular group to be their "home group." They attend their home group meetings regularly, and come to rely upon the members of the group for encouragement, support, and understanding.

They find it helpful to have a closer relationship with this one group and its members, and enjoy the benefits of participating in the group.

What is the difference between an "open" and a "closed" meeting?

All Al-Anon meetings are open to anyone whose life has been affected by someone else's problem drinking.

However, some Al-Anon meeting schedules designate certain meetings as "open" and other meetings as "closed." "Open" meetings welcome students and professionals, who want to observe an Al-Anon meeting for educational purposes. "Closed" meetings do not welcome any observers, but they are open to anyone and everyone who is personally concerned about the effects of someone else's drinking.

What is Alateen?

Young people who have a parent, guardian, or other family member who suffers from alcoholism are especially vulnerable to the stresses and challenges of living in an unstable and sometimes violent home. They can find understanding and support from their peers—other teens facing similar problems—in an Alateen group, which is an Al-Anon group for younger members, usually between the ages of 13 and 18.

Alateen meetings are often held at the same time and place as an Al-Anon meeting, although they are not available everywhere. Young people are also welcome to attend Al-Anon meetings. Online Alateen meetings are also available.

How much does Al-Anon cost?

Al-Anon has no dues or fees. Groups request voluntary contributions at meetings to cover expenses, such as rent or the cost of Al-Anon literature. Many members contribute out of gratitude for the benefits that they have received from the group.

What role does Al-Anon service play in recovery?

Participation in the group will help you to more fully experience the benefits of the program. Service can be as simple as helping to set up the chairs before the meeting, sharing your personal experience during the meeting, or helping put away the literature afterward.

Al-Anon service is part of the recovery process. Many service opportunities are available for newer members, as well as longtime members. Choose an activity and begin to participate. Even someone who has only attended a few meetings has something to share with others. Actively participating and carrying the message is an essential part of our recovery.

What is sponsorship?

Sponsorship is a one-to-one relationship between two Al-Anon members. It is an opportunity to explore aspects of the Al-Anon program in greater depth than is possible at an Al-Anon meeting.

A Sponsor is a more experienced member who serves as a mentor in the Al-Anon program. Sponsors share their own experience without trying to direct or control the personal decisions of anyone else. The relationship is mutually beneficial as a growth opportunity for both the Sponsor and the person sponsored.

You can ask someone to be your Sponsor whenever you feel ready. Pick someone you feel you could learn from. For more information about sponsorship, see the *Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover* bookmark (M-78), included in the Newcomer Packet. Also, see the pamphlet, *Sponsorship—What It's All About* (P-31).

What other resources are available?

Al-Anon's Public Outreach Web site, al-anon.org, offers access to a variety of electronic resources, as does the Al-Anon Members' Web site, al-anon.org/members. The Members' Web site is accessible by password. Use the name of your group, followed by AFG.

Now what do I do?

As Al-Anon and Alateen members, we have found it helpful to:

- Obtain a meeting schedule.
- Attend several different meetings, to find one, or more, that meet your needs.
- Ask questions and talk to other members before and after meetings.
- Read the magazine, *The Forum*, and other Al-Anon and Alateen books and pamphlets. The *Getting Started* pamphlet (S-15R) offers a brief overview of some of the literature that newcomers have found helpful.

If you still have questions, feel free to ask them. We offer you our friendship and our understanding. Please "Keep Coming Back."

- A bond focused on Al-Anon's *four primary ideas*:*
 - We are powerless over the problem of alcoholism
 - We can turn our lives over to a Power greater than ourselves
 - We need to change both our attitude and our actions
 - We keep Al-Anon's gifts by sharing them with others.

**Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2004-2006*, page 10

Sponsors – Members who are:

- Respectful of the anonymity of others
- Willing to freely give time to the relationship
- Continuing to work on their own recovery
- Comfortable to be with; encouraging, not pushy
- Open minded listeners
- Equal partners in recovery
- Able to listen without giving advice
- A recovery resource *for learning how to use the Al-Anon principles*.

It is important to recognize that relationships sometimes change as we grow in Al-Anon. In order to continue growing, it may become necessary to change sponsors. Sponsorship is not a lifelong commitment; letting go is not a sign of failure. Additional information on sponsorship can be found in *Sponsorship, What It's All About* (P-31) and *Service Sponsorship—Working Smarter, Not Harder* (P-88).



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stop drinking; that sobriety does not mean "happily ever after;" and that we are each responsible for dealing with our own pain. We also heard about placing our trust in a Power greater than ourselves.

We continue to come to Al-Anon because it works. It works because it is a positive program that is grounded in

Sponsorship- Working Together to Recover

Sponsorship is a confidential relationship between two Al-Anon members who benefit from sharing experience, strength, and hope. The intimate details exchanged strengthen the bonds of compassion, acceptance, and understanding. This private relationship is focused on the Al-Anon principles. Making a commitment to this special relationship, or letting go of the relationship, is a personal choice.

Sponsorship Is:

- A relationship built on equality, anonymity, and trust
- An opportunity for growth – for both the Sponsee and the Sponsor
- A benefit at any stage of recovery
- A commitment to practice healthy communication – not based on intimidation or demands
- An agreement to recover and grow together; not to struggle in isolation
- An opportunity for self-discovery; not a teacher-pupil relationship
- An experience based on unconditional love, not shame or judgment
- A spiritual relationship with no strings attached
- A one-to-one relationship; not an exclusive club

Al-Anon Spoken Here

SERVICE

For some of us, Al-Anon was a last resort: we were in pain, we were desperate, some of us had abandoned hope. We came to our first meeting –and we kept coming—to find relief from the terrible pain we had grown accustomed to feeling. We knew that our suffering was related to someone else's drinking, and we knew that we were unable to lead a normal life because of it.

As newcomers to Al-Anon Family Groups, which include Alateen, many of us wondered what the group would be talking about. We may have been surprised by the things we heard—and did not hear—at the meetings. Some of us had come into the program believing that once the alcoholic sobered up, our pain would magically disappear. We thought members of Al-Anon/Alateen might teach us how to stop the drinking.

A great many myths were laid to rest at our meetings. We heard that we could not make another person stop drinking; that sobriety does not mean "happily ever after;" and that we are each responsible for dealing with our own pain. We also heard about placing our trust in a Power greater than ourselves.

We continue to come to Al-Anon because it works. It works because it is a positive program that is grounded in

the common experiences of its members—people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking.

Al-Anon works because it helps us focus on ourselves and our own recovery. Above all, Al-Anon works because it is a simple program.

Al-Anon's simplicity is reflected in the tools of the program—the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service, the Serenity Prayer, slogans, sponsorship, Conference Approved Literature, *The Forum* magazine, and the special gift of Al-Anon/Alateen members' sharing from the heart. These simple tools help us cut through all the negativity and confusion, reminding us that beyond our individual differences is a spiritual core that unifies us and helps us find serenity. This is what makes us better and this is what keeps us coming back.

As grateful Al-Anon or Alateen members, we can show our love and gratitude for the program by strengthening group harmony, trying to be positive, and keeping it simple. The Al-Anon program was there for us; respecting its Traditions and principles will help ensure that it will continue to be there for others.

What do Al-Anon/Alateen members talk about at meetings?

At our group meetings, we share our experience, strength, and hope with one another, keeping the focus on ourselves and the Al-Anon tools of recovery. Personal recovery through spiritual growth and the common welfare of the group are of prime importance. By concentrating on our feelings and attitudes toward our situation—rather than on the details of the situation—we contribute to the group's unity and our recovery. We talk about how the disease of alcoholism has affected our thinking and our behavior. We talk about the part we played in our problems and how we change our attitudes and actions by applying the Al-Anon program to our lives. We may find that basing our group discussion on a Step, Tradition, Concept, a slogan, or various other program tools helps to improve our understanding of the program, foster growth, and bring serenity.

What are the Twelve Steps and Traditions? Are they religious?

The Twelve Steps are the heart of the Al-Anon pro-

gram; the Twelve Traditions are its backbone. They are not based on any specific religious discipline, together they provide a spiritual foundation for Al-Anon/Alateen members and groups. The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions embody principles that lead to recovery and personal growth, helping each of us to discover and become the person we want to be. By applying these principles in our daily lives, we can improve our feelings about ourselves and our attitudes toward our situation. The Steps serve the individual member, the Traditions serve the group as a whole. They help safeguard group harmony and keep the Al-Anon program positive and undiluted.

What is the point of the slogans and the Serenity Prayer?

The slogans and the Serenity Prayer affirm our reliance on a Higher Power for our spiritual growth. Interpreting the slogans and Serenity Prayer in terms of the Al-Anon program helps us deal with daily personal problems. We often find them to be especially valuable as topics for our group meetings.

Why are sponsorship and one-to-one sharing necessary?

Because meetings are oriented to group needs and are limited by time, we cannot each bring our specific problems to the group for discussion. Sponsorship and one-on-one sharing provide us with the opportunity to unburden ourselves in a personal and constructive way. They supplement meetings and help us establish new and healthy relationships within the fellowship. In Al-Anon and Alateen meetings, we avoid giving or asking specific advice on family problems, finances, separation, divorce, sex, legal matters, medical, psychiatric, or religious aid. We concentrate instead on what has been helpful to us in our situation. We can listen, we can offer our friendship, and we can allow others to learn to help themselves.

What is "telephone sharing"?

Calling members between meetings helps us to remember how to apply the program to our lives. Both members using the phone benefit from courteous, confidential conversations of reasonable length that reaffirm positive attitudes. In this way, we feel that we are not alone in dealing with a problem. The telepho-

provides us with an opportunity to exchange loving support and gives us easy access to a Sponsor's assistance.

Why is anonymity so often a topic at meetings?

We guard the anonymity of all Al-Anon/Alateen and A.A. members. This means not revealing to anyone what we hear or whom we see at meetings, not to our relatives, friends, or other Al-Anon/Alateen members. Our free expression—so important to our recovery—rests on our sense of security, knowing that what we share at our meetings will be held in strict confidence. While each member has the right of decision regarding personal anonymity within the fellowship, the use of first-names-only reminds us that we are equals in Al-Anon. This keeps us humble and enables us to develop spiritually.

So much of my pain involves living with active drinking. How do I focus on myself when the alcoholic is my problem?

When we first come to Al-Anon Family Groups, full of hurt, frustration, and anger, we may see the alcoholic as the immediate source of our pain. Our impulse may be to focus our discussion on that person. We may also be so unaccustomed to looking at ourselves that we tend to talk about everything but ourselves. In Al-Anon we come to realize that much of our discomfort comes from our attitudes. We work to change these attitudes, and to learn about our responsibility to ourselves. This helps us discover feelings of self-worth and furthers our spiritual growth. The emphasis is lifted from the alcoholic and placed where it is appropriate—on ourselves. When we tell our story, therefore, it is not the alcoholic's story, it is the story of our recovery.

My family and I are involved in an outside recovery program. Wouldn't the insights from this therapy be valuable to the rest of the fellowship?

According to our Traditions, Al-Anon endorses no outside enterprise and has no opinion on outside issues.

Our focus is on ourselves and introduction of outside influences diverts us from spiritual goals. Reviewing our therapy sessions, prayer or meditation groups, or discussing our religious beliefs during meetings dilutes the Al-Anon message and can deprive others of the unique help Al-Anon has to offer. We also avoid the use of professional jargon. Terms used in particular therapies or other programs do not belong in Al-Anon/Alateen meetings.

Why does Al-Anon/Alateen discourage the use of professional terminology at its meetings?

As noted in our *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* concerning the dilution of the Al-Anon program, "Focus on the Al-Anon interpretation of our program is strengthened when we avoid using professional terms and labels, since they may confuse members by implying affiliation with certain persons or specific therapies." Our recovery depends on our concentrating on ourselves as Al-Anon/Alateen members rather than on the alcoholic.

I am a member of Al-Anon/Alateen and a recovering alcoholic. How much of my personal experience with alcohol is appropriate to share at Al-Anon/Alateen meetings?

Some of us in Al-Anon find that we, too, suffer from the disease of alcoholism. The details of our struggle with alcoholism and recovery, however, belong in our A.A. story. Al-Anon is not a program for finding, maintaining, or enhancing sobriety. It is a program for people who want to recover from the effects of someone else's drinking. Our identification is based on this common bond, and drawing from the strength of the group is part of our recovery.

I am a member of another anonymous program. Recently I was asked not to discuss it at our Al-Anon/Alateen meetings. Why?

Our meeting discussions do not include any other program or fellowship. When we talk about our experiences of becoming sober, drug-free, or how we

stopped overeating or gambling, we take away from the Al-Anon focus. In Al-Anon, we focus on our common experience—having been affected by someone else's alcoholism—and our recovery by giving and receiving mutual aid based only on that common experience. Those of us who are members of other anonymous programs avoid openly revealing this at meetings, concentrating instead on the Al-Anon approach to the family illness of alcoholism.

As a psychotherapist – and an Al-Anon member – I feel that my professional experience can enrich our group's discussion. Why have I been discouraged from sharing my knowledge at meetings?

Those of us in the helping professions may be especially sensitive to the pain of others. We may sense the pain of fellow Al-Anon members and wish to share the benefits of our professional expertise. In Al-Anon, however, we meet and share as equals: no one is an expert. Our success comes from maintaining a nonprofessional approach, and from adhering to the principle of anonymity. We all have something to give and something to take from our meetings regardless of our educational, social, or professional backgrounds.

Can an outside speaker address an Al-Anon/Alateen meeting?

Our personal growth in Al-Anon is based in a large part on the ideas and experiences shared by other Al-Anon/Alateen members. Although speakers from the helping professions—doctors, social workers, family court judges, or members of the clergy, for example—occasionally are asked to address an Al-Anon/Alateen meeting, we find that they can divert the focus from our own recovery to that of the alcoholic. It is well to ensure that any outside speaker asked to address a meeting is experienced in the field of alcoholism and knowledgeable about the Al-Anon program. It is also helpful to suggest a topic to an outside speaker. We are careful to avoid inviting those who promote a particular therapy, therapist, treatment center, mode of recovery, or specific institution. Al-Anon or Alateen members are excellent choices as speakers for special

occasions such as anniversaries—their personal stories of recovery through the Al-Anon program can give strength and hope to those who hear them.

What about outside readings on alcoholism and its effects?

Only Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature and materials, including *The Forum* magazine, are used at Al-Anon and Alateen meetings. For the newcomer, we find this literature—combined with the experiences shared by the fellowship—is the best tool for developing a positive, spiritual perspective of the disease of alcoholism. Al-Anon and Alateen literature is approved by our Conference because it reflects the program as it is in principle and practice. Personal experiences shared in *The Forum* help us to understand how others have succeeded in applying the program to their lives. As we grow in Al-Anon, we are less likely to be confused or overwhelmed by outside readings. Individuals may read whatever they choose as part of their personal recovery outside of meetings. However, meeting time is too valuable to spend on discussions of non-Al-Anon books, tapes, films, pamphlets, or recovery strategies, no matter how useful they have been to one or many of us.

What can Al-Anon/Alateen members do when they think the program is being diluted with outside issues or the topic of conversation is not appropriate for an Al-Anon/ Alateen meeting?

Usually, we can gently guide the topic back to the Al-Anon focus should it stray during a meeting. Occasionally, however, it may be more appropriate for us to speak to other members on an individual basis or discuss the subject at a group inventory meeting. Some groups read a statement after the Suggested Welcome asking members to focus on the Al-Anon program of recovery.

Conclusion

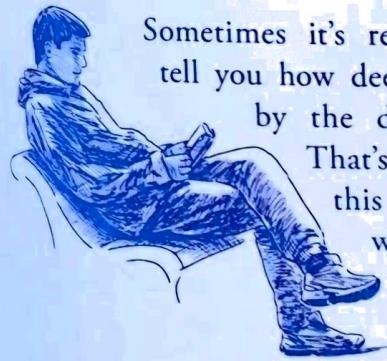
These guidelines for meeting discussions are based on the Twelve Traditions. The Traditions help us avoid obstacles to group unity and remind us to keep our focus on the fellowship's common purpose.

Together with the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, the Traditions can provide answers to a wide range of group-related questions. It is important to remember that neither of these tools is a rulebook. Accepting the Traditions amounts to "obeying the unenforceable." If a group does not observe the Traditions, it risks the possibility of conflict or error, and could inadvertently deprive members of the help that so many others have found in Al-Anon.

Al-Anon is for our own recovery from the effects of the disease of alcoholism. We come to Al-Anon/Alateen meetings seeking care, understanding, and hope. The program helps us to look within and to take responsibility for ourselves, to improve our attitudes, and to place our lives in the care of a Higher Power. We do not get the Al-Anon program anywhere else, and when we come to our meetings, the Al-Anon program is all we expect to hear. Ensuring that Al-Anon is spoken here strengthens group harmony and helps keep our program positive, healthy, and enduring.

Alateens share with Adults in Their Lives

RECOVER



Sometimes it's really hard for me to tell you how deeply affected I've been by the disease of alcoholism. That's why I am giving you this pamphlet, hoping you will understand why I need to go to Alateen meetings. Many times I was afraid to tell you

how much the drinking and fighting bothered me. I thought constantly about what was going on at home. It got in the way of my schoolwork and friendships. I was so embarrassed that I was afraid to bring my friends over and at times I didn't even want to go home myself. I felt it was *my* fault we had so many problems, but in Alateen I learned that alcoholism is a family illness. Alateen also helped me realize it wasn't you I hated, but the disease.

This is what some of my Alateen friends have to share:

Jenny: "I'm writing to you because this is the easiest way for me to tell you what Alateen means to me. At first I felt I was the only person in this world who had problems. Then I started listening to what Alateens had to say and something inside me just opened up. Now I look forward to meetings, not only because I see my friends there, but I also want to make my life better. I appreciate your making me go to those first few meetings and for letting me go now. I feel our relationship has grown stronger."

Andrew: "Mom, during Dad's early sobriety, you were often too involved with him, and it seemed you didn't care about me. Your arguments made me feel lonely and scared. I tried to get you to stop and pay more attention to me. When you were tense, you'd snap at me and I felt lost. Now, Alateen offers me a chance to discuss my feelings and I feel accepted by my Alateen friends. I now realize that you've been affected by Dad's alcoholism just as I have."

William: "I don't know where I'd be without Alateen. Here, I can express my feelings without fear of being ridiculed. My mind has been opened to a world I never knew existed."

Mary Sue: "Although Alateen will not fix me completely, it has helped me discover a new way of looking at my life. I've made friends in Alateen, but I don't go just for social reasons. I go to get help for my difficulties in living with alcoholism. Before Alateen, I didn't understand. When I was yelled at, I would scream back, run to my room, and slam the door. Alateen has shown me that I can calm down and detach from the situation without having to react."

Laurie: "Alateen has given me the gift of sanity. Before I went to meetings, I had uncontrollable feelings of anger and hostility toward others, especially those of my own family. Now I've learned to be grateful for the little things—youth, laughter, a family who cares."

Mark: "I became a part of Alateen because of my parents' open communication with me. As I watched them grow in their separate programs, I became jealous as I saw their fighting come to an end. I was still grumpy and I wanted to be happy, too. I'm thankful to my parents for guiding me toward the path called Alateen."

To the adults in my life,

Alcoholics suffer from alcoholism mentally, spiritually, and physically. Well, guess what? So does the family, regardless of age or maturity. I always used to hide my feelings, pretending that I didn't care when I was crying inside. Alateen has given me love, hope, and the feeling that I'm not alone. Please know that Alateen . . .

- Is for kids like me who have been affected by someone else's drinking.
- Provides a safe place where I can share.
- Helps me understand the family disease of alcoholism.



- Is a place for me to learn to feel good about myself.
- Encourages me to change my attitude instead of reacting to the situation.
- Gives me the courage to detach with love.
- Is anonymous—we don't discuss what we hear or whom we see at meetings.

I hope this has given you a clearer picture of Alateen's importance in my life. I guess I just want to tell you that I need Alateen.

P.S. Here's what our Alateen Group Sponsor says about Alateen

As an Alateen Group Sponsor, I have a very special place in your child's life. I'm there to offer guidance at meetings and to provide a safe place where Alateens can talk freely. A Group Sponsor doesn't play the role of teacher, as we share rather than educate. I do not assume a parental role, as I could never take your place. We learn to respect children as people and they learn to trust us because we honor their confidentiality.

Try to remember, Alateen is not:

- A therapy program.
- A program for teenagers with drinking or drug problems.
- A place to complain about parents or anyone else.
- A place for fixing your child.
- A babysitting service.
- A social hangout.
- A punishment tool; it's a recovery tool.

I wish I could convey to you how much Alateen means to me. I guess being there every week explains it. Each time I think of all the kids who've been helped and of all the fun I've had in the process of sponsoring, I now know how much I believe in Alateen.

If you ever have any doubts about your loved ones needing Alateen, keep this in mind: *You don't have to drink to suffer from alcoholism.*



Getting Started

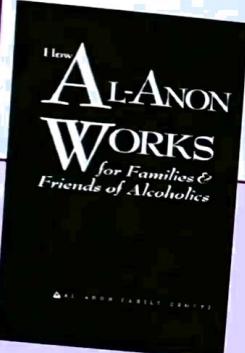
Welcome to your first Al-Anon meeting!

As friends and family members of alcoholics, we can provide mutual support to each other that isn't available anywhere else. We hope you'll keep coming back.

In addition to meetings, there is also a wide range of Al-Anon and Alateen literature that deepens our understanding of alcoholism and its effects.

The book *How Al-Anon Works* (B-22, B-32) provides a good overview of the Al-Anon

program and is available in hard- and soft-cover editions as well as e-book and audio book versions.



Daily readers. Al-Anon's three daily readers can be a source of encouragement and understanding "One Day at a Time."

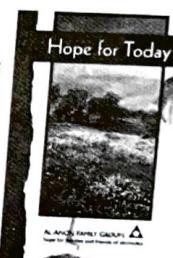
One Day at a Time in Al-Anon (B-6) shares spiritual insights on the difficult challenges of coping with the effects of someone else's alcoholism. It is also available as an audio book.



Courage to Change (B-16) focuses on the opportunities for personal growth that the Al-Anon program offers.

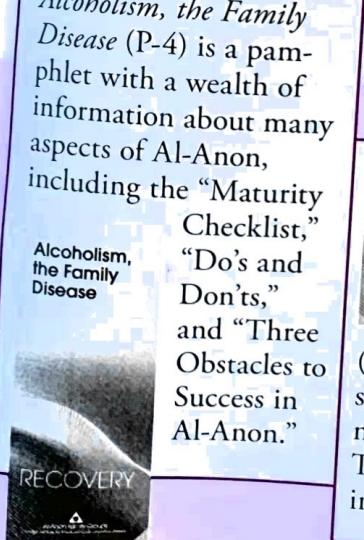


Hope for Today (B-27) explores some of the deeper spiritual issues that arise as a result of living with alcoholism.



Alcoholism, the Family Disease (P-4) is a pamphlet with a wealth of information about many aspects of Al-Anon, including the "Maturity

Checklist," "Do's and Don'ts," and "Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon."



Information for the Newcomer



The *Information for the Newcomer* pamphlet (S-4) provides answers to some of the most commonly asked questions. This pamphlet is included in the Newcomer Packet.

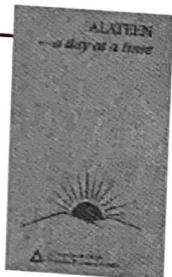
Alateen literature provides simple and clear insight into complex family issues, which makes it helpful reading for adult members of Al-Anon, as well.

*Alateen—Hope for
Children of Alcoholics
(B-3)*

is an easy-to-understand explanation of alcoholism and the Alateen program



Hope for Children of Alcoholics



Alateen—*a day at a time*
(B-10) is one of Alateen's two daily readers. Alateen members share how they practice their program, "One Day at a Time."

Youth and the Alcoholic Parent (P-21) includes questions and suggestions to help young people improve their own lives.



For parents of young children and teens

Parents tell how they helped their children cope with an alcoholic family situation in the pamphlet, ***How Can I Help My Children?*** (P-9)

How Can I Help My Children?



Literature Order Form

Literature Order Form

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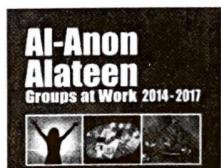
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DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

Participation improves understanding. There are many opportunities for participation that make Al-Anon an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The following booklets focus on participation in Al-Anon service activities as an opportunity for personal growth.

Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work (P-24) explains all aspects of how an Al-Anon or Alateen group functions. It is a guide that summarizes everything you want to know about Al-Anon groups.



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Suggested Meeting Format Outline
• Suggested Meeting Format Readings
• General Readings
• How to Start a Group
• How to Run a Meeting
• Group Service Positions
• Supporting Group Growth
• Resources for Members and Groups
• Directions of the Al-Anon/Alateen Fellowship



When I
Got Busy,
I Got
Better

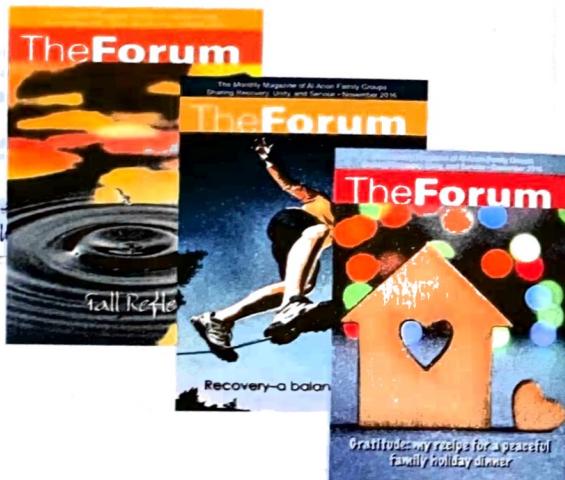
Al-Anon Family Groups
Strength and hope for families and friends of problem drinkers.

Some communities have an Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) or a Literature Distribution Center (LDC), where Al-Anon literature can be purchased.

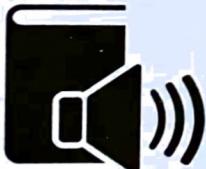
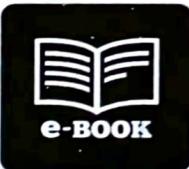
A selection of literature is available for purchase at many Al-Anon meetings, as well as from Al-Anon's "Online Store," al-anon.org/onlinestore.



Forum. Many groups have sample copies of *The Forum* to share with newcomers. This monthly magazine opens a window to the shared recovery of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups. Three articles from the magazine are published monthly on Al-Anon's Public Outreach Web site, al-anon.org, as well as brief excerpts on the Al-Anon WSO Facebook page, which includes links to these articles on the Web site. Personal subscriptions are available from Al-Anon's "Online Store."



Several Al-Anon and Alateen books have been published electronically as e-books or as audio books, including our basic book, *How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics*. Al-Anon e-books and audio books can be purchased directly from the major electronic media distributors.



The Forum subscription order form

The voice of Al-Anon recovery—today

Al-Anon's monthly magazine features timely sharings from Al-Anon and Alateen members, suggested meeting topics, and the latest information on worldwide Al-Anon recovery.

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www.alanonla.org

**"Today, many Al-Anon/Alateen members,
regardless of age or relationship to the alcoholic,
are finding serenity despite a friend or family
member with an active drinking problem."**

This is Al-Anon (P-32)

Toll free number for group meeting
information only

**1-888-4-Al-Anon
(888-425-2666)**

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