

Al-Anon guidelines

The Shared Experience of Al-Anon and Alateen Members.

Starting an Al-Anon Group

G-12

Starting and building a healthy group is a spiritual undertaking. It takes time and commitment. Before you start or decide to disband a group—ask for help! The district, the Area, and the WSO are available to offer information, support, and encouragement. Al-Anon is a “we” program—you don’t need to go it alone! Additional information for starting and maintaining a healthy group can be found in the *Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work* booklet (P-24).

Who can start a group?

Any two or more relatives or friends of alcoholics who meet to solve their common problem of being affected by someone else’s drinking may call themselves an Al-Anon group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. Professionals or A.A. members may initiate the formation of an Al-Anon/Alateen group provided that the meetings are then conducted by Al-Anon/Alateen members.

These are the essentials needed to start a group. Depending on individual needs, there may be other factors and the sequence of events may differ.

- Contact your District Representative or Area Delegate (the WSO can provide this information) for guidance and possible assistance.
- Determine the kind of meeting you want to start. See “What Types of Al-Anon Meetings are There?”
- Decide on a day and time; consider other meetings in your vicinity when making this decision.
- Find a location to hold the meeting (such as: community centers, schools, hospitals, religious, and other public facilities).
 - Groups that meet at sites such as military bases, industrial plants, or schools may have access limited due to the facility’s entry restrictions.
- Set a date for the first meeting.
- Select an appropriate name for the group. See “What Name Should We Choose?”
- Contact your Area Group Records Coordinator for information about your Area’s process to register with the WSO, Area Assembly, and local Al-Anon Information Service.
- Distribute flyers to the district, Al-Anon Information Service, other groups, and post in public places.

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Special meetings

Beginners’ meetings—some regular Al-Anon groups hold a special beginners’ meeting before, or in conjunction with, the regular meeting in order to provide newcomers a simple introduction to Al-Anon. Special meetings are hosted by an Al-Anon group and served by that group’s Group Representative. (See the *Beginners’ Meeting* Guideline [G-2]).

Introductory meetings are held at institutions, such as hospitals, treatment centers, and shelters, or any other location where families of alcoholics gather. Attendance at these meetings changes frequently. Attendees at the meeting are encouraged to attend regular Al-Anon meetings. Introductory meetings are not considered Al-Anon groups and do not have their own Group Representative.

What name should we choose?

A group’s name is sometimes included in printed or on-line meeting directories and may be a potential member’s first impression of Al-Anon and Alateen. A group name should be inviting to all and reflective of Al-Anon principles. It should not imply affiliation with any other Twelve Step program, self-help group, commercial venture, religious group, or other outside enterprise, even if the name is associated with its location. A name that includes the town or section of town, the meeting day, a slogan, or another phrase from our program is inviting to all and conforms to Al-Anon/Alateen principles.

The group name may provide information about the format of the meeting, such as Step study or speaker meeting. Some groups offer beginner topics as a way to attract newcomers. These groups register as regular Al-Anon groups and have a Group Representative. They may use “Beginner” in their group name.

Some groups are formed by relatives and friends of alcoholics who find it easier to address their common problems in dealing with the effects of someone else’s drinking with those in similar life situations. Al-Anon groups for men, women, adult children of alcoholics, parents, and lesbians and gays (LGBT) may include that designation in the group name with the understanding that, as with all Al-Anon groups, membership remains open to anyone affected by someone else’s drinking. See “Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work” and “Digest of Al-Anon & Alateen Policies”

sections of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) for additional information.

Things to discuss when choosing a group name include:

- How is this name reflective of Al-Anon's principles?
- Is the name inviting to potential members? Could it be confusing or offensive to potential members?
- Does the name imply a promise, requirement for attending, or an affiliation with an entity outside of Al-Anon?

The WSO reviews new group names for adherence to Al-Anon principles.

All Al-Anon groups are registered with the letters "AFG" (for Al-Anon Family Group) in order to protect the CMA's (Current Mailing Address) anonymity.

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What types of Al-Anon meetings are there?

- "Open" meetings allow attendance by people who are not families and friends of alcoholics but who are interested in learning about Al-Anon Family Groups. People who may come to open meetings occasionally include students and professionals who work with alcoholics and their families.
- "Closed" meetings are for members and prospective members whose lives are affected by someone else's drinking. Groups that register a meeting as "closed" may decide to hold an occasional "open" meeting in order to reach out to professionals and others interested in Al-Anon.

What group positions are needed to begin?

The following is a brief outline of group trusted servants. An in-depth description can be found in the *Al-Anon/Alateen Groups at Work* booklet (P-24) that is sent after the group registers:

- The CMA (Current Mailing Address) regularly attends the meeting and is willing to receive group postal and electronic mail, and bring it to the group.
- Group Contacts regularly attend the meeting and are willing to receive calls from potential members seeking Al-Anon's help or others seeking directions or specific information about the group.

- The Chairperson/Secretary opens and closes meetings, provides speakers, introduces topic or program, (may be separate positions). The Secretary often acts as the Treasurer until the group is large enough to elect one.

As membership in the group grows, additional service opportunities can be added, such as those listed below:

- The Treasurer collects Seventh Tradition donations and money from literature sales, maintains group funds, pays group expenses, reports income/expenses at regular intervals, and reminds members of the need to contribute to the WSO and the local service structure. (In some groups, the GR or chairperson announces appeals for funding our service structure.)
- The Literature Chairperson orders and displays Conference Approved Literature.
- Greeters welcome all members, especially those new to the group.
- The Hospitality Chairperson arranges for the set-up and clean-up of refreshments.
- The Group Representative (GR) represents the group at district meetings and Area Assemblies, makes Al-Anon announcements, suggests application of the Twelve Traditions at group business meetings, encourages the use of Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature and *The Forum*, and shares information from Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. Al-Anon members who are also members of A.A. may not serve as GR.

How do we register with the WSO?

Contact your Area Group Records Coordinator or the World Service Office to request an Al-Anon Registration/Group Change Form (GR-1). The GR-1 is also available on the Members' Web site at www.al-anon.org/members.

Required information:

- Name of your group.
- Date, time, and any special features of your meeting (smoking permitted, wheelchair accessibility, etc.) including instructions (i.e. upstairs, downstairs).
- CMA (Current Mailing Address) receives the postal and electronic mail from the WSO and takes the mail to the group. The group may use a post office box for the group mailing address and a group e-mail address for receiving electronic mail. In keeping with the Seventh Tradition, groups that use the facility address as their mailing address need to make prior arrangements with the facility and collect their mail on a regular basis.

Note: The WSO will register any group designating itself as an Al-Anon Family Group with the understanding that it will abide by the Traditions and that meetings will be open to any Al-Anon or Alateen member. The WSO cannot register any group that is solely for Al-Anon members who are also recovering alcoholics and members of A.A., because it does not qualify to have a Group Representative.

What can we expect from our district and Area?

Within each Al-Anon Area there are usually districts with District Representatives (DRs). Once the group begins, attendance at district meetings by the GR will keep the group informed and connected. Districts are a resource to the group for information and support.

- Working with a DR can help you determine the needs of your district in terms of starting a group. Some districts provide start-up literature and other information to help new groups.
- DRs often visit the group to provide support, information, and assist the groups with problems that may occur.
- District involvement helps to get other members to attend and support your meeting.
- The local Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) and Area Assembly can make referrals to your group.

What can we expect from the WSO?

Registration with the WSO ensures a connection with worldwide Al-Anon. Upon registration, your group can count on the WSO for ongoing support including the following:

- A series of three packets:
 1. The first packet includes *Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work* (P-24) and a variety of pamphlets and service tools beneficial for new groups.
 2. The second packet is sent six months later and includes the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) and additional group information.
 3. The third packet is sent around the group's first anniversary and includes information for growing groups.
- A complimentary copy of *The Forum* magazine which includes "Inside Al-Anon" articles of interest to groups as well as personal sharings from members.
- The WSO's electronic newsletter *Group e-News*, sent monthly to the CMA's e-mail address.
- A quarterly appeal letter from the WSO.
- An Annual Group Update Sheet and other periodic postal mailings.

When additional information about the meeting is requested from callers on the toll-free meeting line, the WSO will refer callers to your Group Contacts.

How can the group attract members?

Announce the formation of your group to as many individuals as possible. Invite members from other groups. Your group may have a small attendance at first; Al-Anon is a program of attraction. Given time, the group will grow. Here are some suggestions...

- Announce the meeting at local district and Al-Anon Information Service meetings.
- Notify professionals such as members of the clergy, medical, and legal professions, and others who counsel families of alcoholics.
- Announce the meeting time, date, and location in the local newspaper. Many papers list the meetings without charge in the local events column.
- Ask A.A. members to announce the start of your new meeting.

The Al-Anon Group
 is the
heart
 of the
Al-Anon Program!
