

Al-Anon guidelines

The Shared Experience of Al-Anon and Alateen Members.

Starting an Al-Anon Group

G-12

This guideline can aid you in establishing an Al-Anon group that meets in a physical location. Starting and building a healthy Al-Anon Family Group is a spiritual undertaking. It takes time, planning and commitment. Before you start a group, ask for help! The District, the Area and the World Service Office (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 “Groups at Work” section of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27), which is posted on the alanon.org website.

Who can start a group?

Any two or more relatives or friends of alcoholics who meet to solve the common problems they face because of someone else’s drinking may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. Anyone can request that an Al-Anon meeting be started in their community. However, Al-Anon meetings are only conducted by Al-Anon members.

Getting the Al-Anon group started

- Contact your District Representative (DR) or Area Delegate (the WSO can provide you with their contact information) to initiate the communication between the group and the District. These trusted servants are your group’s link to the worldwide fellowship.
- Determine the kind of meeting you want to start. (See “Meeting Ideas” in the “Groups at Work” section of the *Service Manual*.)
- Decide on a day and time; consider other meetings in your vicinity when making this decision, as well as meetings that take place in the same location.
- Find a location in a public facility that is welcoming to all. Consider the accessibility for physically challenged members.
- Set a meeting with the facility representative to inquire about rental fees, due dates and any possible facility restrictions and/or requirements. Some facilities require proof of liability insurance. Contact your DR or Area Delegate for guidance if proof of insurance is requested.
- Set a date for the first meeting.
- Select a group name that reflects Al-Anon principles. The name of the group can include the meeting format (i.e. Twelve Steps, Book Study, etc.) and the neighborhood where it meets, but not the name of the facility (to avoid the appearance of affiliation). Experience suggests that group names that are humorous and/or include acronyms can be misunderstood by newcomers seeking Al-Anon’s help and hope.

- Decide whether the group is “open” or “closed.”

◇ **Open** meetings allow attendance by people who are interested in learning about Al-Anon Family Groups for professional or educational purposes. Since almost 50 percent of newcomers are referred to Al-Anon by professionals, holding open meetings greatly expands Al-Anon’s reach to families and friends who are still suffering.

◇ **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.

Benefits of registration

- Registered groups are listed on the WSO website, al-anon.org, and information is provided to those who call the toll-free meeting line. This connection between the group and the worldwide fellowship is in keeping with Al-Anon’s one purpose: to help families and friends of alcoholics.
- When additional information about the meeting is requested by callers on the toll-free meeting line, WSO Staff refer callers to your Group Phone Contact(s) for the Public.
- The WSO sends introductory materials to new groups to help them get started.
- The Annual Group Update, which is also sent from the WSO, helps to provide the most current meeting information on the al-anon.org website and the WSO toll-free meeting line for anyone seeking help in Al-Anon.
- The Quarterly Appeal Letter, which is sent from the WSO, provides individual members with the opportunity to carry Al-Anon’s message of help and hope worldwide by supporting services such as publishing Conference Approved Literature, conducting the World Service Conference, maintaining the WSO website and toll-free meeting line, and more.

Registering the new Al-Anon group

The “Registration of Groups” policy states: *“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 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 (GR).”* (See the “Digest of Al-Anon and Alateen Policies” section of the *Service Manual*.)

Fill out the New Al-Anon Group Registration Form, which is available online at alanon.org. Directions are provided, and the form can be submitted online or downloaded and sent via postal mail or fax. Provide as much detail as possible that will assist a newcomer in finding the meeting, such as:

- where to park;
- which door to use for entry;
- which room number to go to;
- if sign-in is required to gain entry into the building (as in some hospitals and private facilities);
- which days the group won’t meet, such as holidays, e.g., “does not meet on days when school is closed.”

Connecting to the District and Area

- Your DR, Area Group Records Coordinator or local Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) can inform you of the procedures for listing the meeting on the Area and AIS websites as well as local meeting lists.
- Announce the new group by distributing flyers with the day, time and location of the meeting to the District, AIS, other groups and in public places.
- Electing a Group Representative (GR) as early as possible will connect the group to the worldwide fellowship through the GR’s attendance at District meetings and Area Assemblies. (See the “World Service Handbook” section of the *Service Manual* for the “Duties of a Group Representative [GR]”.)

Getting the group organized

“Keep it Simple.” In order to register the Al-Anon group, a Current Mailing Address (CMA) and Group Phone Contact(s) for the Public are required. A Chairperson to lead the meeting and a Secretary and/or Treasurer are needed. The initial members starting the meeting can perform these services until membership grows.

- A **Current Mailing Address** (CMA) is a member who regularly attends the meeting, agrees to receive postal and email information on behalf of the group and brings this information to the group.
- The **Chairperson** leads the meeting by opening and closing the meeting and introducing the speaker or topic of discussion.

- The **Secretary/Treasurer** collects the Seventh Tradition contributions and monies from literature sales, pays group expenses and reports income/expenses at regular intervals. These service roles can be divided as the group grows in membership.
- **Group Phone Contact(s) for the Public** are members of the group who are willing to receive phone calls and extend a warm welcome to newcomers, travelers, professionals and others seeking information about the Al-Anon group. Providing other service opportunities such as those described in the “Groups at Work” section of the *Service Manual* is essential for group growth, as it allows more members to participate in Al-Anon’s third Legacy—service.

Think like a newcomer once the meeting begins!!

Newcomers are often confused and scared to go their first meeting. It’s important that they can easily find the group. Helpful considerations include:

- Placing directional signs inside and/or outside the building to lead the newcomer directly to the meeting room;
- Placing a sign on the door of the room where the meeting is held;
- Asking a member of the group to serve as a “greeter” to welcome anyone who comes to the meeting.

Attracting new members

Announce the formation of your group to as many Al-Anon members and at as many Al-Anon events as possible. Invite Al-Anon 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:

- Get involved with the District and AIS meetings. Tap into your links of service!
- Notify members of the clergy, medical and legal professionals, and others who counsel families of alcoholics.
- Have the meeting listed on the District, AIS and Area websites.
- Announce the meeting time, date, and location in the local newspaper. Many papers list the meetings without charge in the local events column.
- Distribute *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism*, the Public Outreach magazine (include your meeting information), in doctors’ offices, libraries and other public places in your community.