Beginners’ Meeting

Beginners’ meetings are an important part of our Al-Anon Family Groups. The purpose of a beginners’ meeting is to introduce newcomers to the Al-Anon program in a welcoming and comforting manner, in an environment where they have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss their feelings with longtime members. Experienced members share about the disease of alcoholism and inform the newcomers about various pieces of Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL). Newcomers are encouraged to attend regular Al-Anon meetings as well.

Registering a beginners’ meeting:

Some Al-Anon groups host a special beginners’ meeting in conjunction with the group meeting. The usual length of time for a special beginners’ meeting is 30 minutes to one hour. These special beginners’ meetings are registered as a part of the hosting Al-Anon group, which has a Group Representative (GR). The formats for these meetings range from one to six weeks; this is up to the autonomy of the hosting group.

Districts and Al-Anon Information Services (AISs) may also host special beginners’ meetings that may or may not be in conjunction with a district or AIS meeting. Groups in the geographical area that the district or AIS serves provide leaders/chairs for the meetings. The formats for these special beginners’ meetings range from one to six weeks; this is up to the autonomy of the hosting district or AIS.

Some Al-Anon groups register as beginners’ meetings as a way to attract newer members. These groups may include “Beginner” as part of their group name. The group’s format focuses on beginner topics, such as the first three Steps, in order to introduce newcomers to the Al-Anon program. These groups register as Al-Anon groups and have a Group Representative.

Things to consider before starting a beginners’ meeting:

- How many beginners’ meetings are there currently in the local area?
- What are the days and times of current beginners’ meetings?
- Are there enough newcomers attending your group to start a special beginners’ meeting?
- How many weeks will newcomers attend the beginners’ meeting?
- Are members willing to make a commitment to support a beginners’ meeting?
- How will potential members get information about the meeting?

Chairing a beginners’ meeting

Beginners’ meetings are conducted by an Al-Anon member who understands the spiritual principles expressed in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. When chairing a beginners’ meeting, members simply share the experience, strength, and hope they found in the Al-Anon program of recovery. Patience, tolerance, and the ability to listen and explain the Al-Anon program to families and friends of alcoholics are important qualities for those who conduct beginners’ meetings. It is a good idea to have two or three other Al-Anon members present to share their experience in applying Al-Anon principles in their own lives and respond to questions that may arise.

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General suggestions for a beginners’ meeting format:
• Open the meeting with the Serenity Prayer and the Suggested Al-Anon/Alateen Welcome. Have extra copies of Groups at Work (P-24) available so newcomers can participate.
• Explain who attends Al-Anon/Alateen meetings and what newcomers may expect at a meeting. Explain that Al-Anon is a non-professional, mutual support program, and that there are no “experts” or counselors in Al-Anon. See Information for the Newcomer (S-4).*
• Let newcomers know that what is said in our meetings, and member-to-member, is confidential, that anonymity is an important principle of our program. Stress that gossip is detrimental to ourselves, to others, and to Al-Anon as a whole. See Tradition Twelve and Tradition Eleven in the “Anonymity” section and “A” in “Optional Readings” in the Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work booklet (P-24).
• Briefly explain that Al-Anon is a spiritual program, and we do not discuss specific religious beliefs or practices. See “Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon,” “C” in “Optional Readings” in Groups at Work.
• Read the Suggested Preamble to the Twelve Steps, followed by the Twelve Steps.
• Remember to allow newcomers ample time to share during the meeting.
• Explain Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL), the importance of reading it, and where it can be purchased. Inform newcomers about Al-Anon/Alateen books, pamphlets, and The Forum magazine. Have How Al-Anon Works (P-22 or P-32) and Newcomer Packets available.
• Explain that Alateen is part of Al-Anon and the help it offers to children of alcoholics.
• Stress the importance of talking with members before and after meetings. Have members’ contact information and local meeting lists available for distribution.
• If the format of the beginners’ meeting includes a series of two or more meetings, stress the importance of attending all of the beginners’ meetings in the series.
• Encourage newcomers to attend other Al-Anon meetings and offer a list of meetings in the community.
• End the meeting with the Suggested Al-Anon/Alateen Closing and the Al-Anon Declaration, or a prayer that is acceptable to the group conscience.

Additional Tips:
• First impressions matter—new members come to Al-Anon looking for help. The manner in which they are welcomed should reflect the understanding, love, and peace of the Al-Anon program. It may not be welcoming to tell newcomers that they are as sick or sicker than the alcoholic.
• It is helpful to introduce the Conference Approved Literature (CAL) that may be appropriate for each of the suggested meetings. A personal explanation about the contents and value of each piece makes our written recovery information come alive. Urge the newcomers to read the Al-Anon books and pamphlets and point out the benefits of each.
• For those newcomers with children, point out that their children will benefit from their practice of the Al-Anon program. Explain that Alateen is the Al-Anon program for teenagers. Note that some meetings may accept younger children; this is up to the autonomy of each Alateen group. It may be helpful to display and discuss Alateen literature, and encourage newcomers to have their children attend Alateen meetings.
• It can be very helpful to offer newcomers a copy of The Forum magazine to read between meetings. The magazine is especially good for newcomers who might feel too afraid to make phone calls, yet.
• Plan an annual business meeting to take an inventory of the beginners’ meeting format.

Packets of pamphlets selected for newcomers to Al-Anon/Alateen are available as follows:
• Al-Anon Newcomer Packet (K-10)
• Alateen Newcomer Packet (K-18)
• Adult Children of Alcoholics Newcomer Packet (K-21)
• Men’s Newcomer Packet (K-23)
• Parents’ Newcomer Packet (K-24)

Additional suggested literature to have available:
• Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work (P-24)
• How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics (B-22 or B-32; also available in audio and e-book formats)
• Purpose and Suggestions (P-13)
• Just for Today (M-12)
• Detachment (S-19)
• Al-Anon, Is It For You? (S-17)
• Alateen, Is It For You? (S-20)
• Did You Grow Up with a Problem Drinker? (S25)
• Sponsorship, What It’s All About (P-31)
• A Guide for the Family of the Alcoholic (P-7)
• Three Views of Al-Anon (P-15)
• Facts About Alateen (P-41)
• Youth and the Alcoholic Parent (P-21)
• How Can I Help my Children? (P-9)

*included in Newcomer Packets.
Suggested Beginner's Meeting Format

**First meeting**
- Describe the impact of the family disease of alcoholism on those close to the alcoholic. Mention that we are not here to talk about the alcoholic, but rather to focus on our own recovery.
- Briefly discuss Step One—emphasizing that we are not responsible for the alcoholic’s behavior.
- Talk about the ideas that we did not cause alcoholism, we cannot control it, and we cannot cure it.
- When a special beginners’ meeting format consists of a single meeting, it is helpful to provide newcomers with a Newcomer Packet (see list on page 3) and briefly review the contents.
- Newcomers should be given contact numbers to call, a local meeting list, and Al-Anon’s Public Outreach Web site address.

**Second meeting**
- Continue to discuss Step One.
- Introduce the importance of living “One Day at a Time.”
- Begin discussion of Step Two.
- Introduce the idea of a home group. Encourage attendance at as many other Al-Anon meetings as possible.

**Third meeting**
- Review Steps One and Two.
- Discuss the slogans. *(Use How Al-Anon Works [B-22 or B-32]).*
- Share about the importance of finding a Sponsor. *(Use the Sponsorship bookmark [M78].)*

**Fourth meeting**
- Discuss Step Three.
- Introduce the Serenity Prayer and discuss its three parts: acceptance, courage, wisdom.
- Continue discussion of sponsorship and the importance of staying in touch between meetings.

**Fifth meeting**
- Recap Steps One, Two, and Three.
- Talk about understanding ourselves and letting go of fears, resentments, and self-pity. *(Some groups read the pamphlet Understanding Ourselves and Alcoholism [P-48], “D” in “Optional Readings” in Groups at Work.)*

**Sixth meeting**
- Explain that each person is a vital part of an Al-Anon group.
- Review the importance of sponsorship and share about selecting a Sponsor. *(See M-78 and the “Individual” navigation tab on the Members’ Web site.)*
- Discuss choosing a home group and how a group is structured according to the Twelve Traditions.
- Briefly tell how Al-Anon came to be.