

FAQs Regarding Young People in Al-Anon meetings

In line with all other organisations in the UK & Eire we are required to consider our responsibilities towards children and other vulnerable groups. Following advice from our Safeguarding Officer, our UK solicitors, Human Resources Background Checks (HRBC), feedback from the Alateen Committee and Conference 2022, the Board discussed the risks posed if young people attend Al-Anon meetings. To ensure the safety of young people, members and the Al-Anon reputation, it was agreed that the minimum age requirement for attending an Al-Anon meeting be 18 years.

This change comes into effect immediately and only relates to Al-Anon meetings, not events such as Conventions, District or Area meetings.

Q In accordance with Tradition Four 'Each group should be autonomous', so can a Group agree to allow people under 18 years of age to attend?

A Tradition Four also states 'except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.' When each Group registers, they agree to abide by the Al-Anon principles and this is now a requirement to enable the Group to hold an Al-Anon meeting and safeguard Al-Anon Family Groups, young people and Al-Anon members.

Q Can babies/toddlers attend an Al-Anon meeting?

A No, the minimum age requirement for attending an Al-Anon meeting is 18 years. Claims have been brought against organisations from individuals claiming to have been adversely affected as babies/toddlers. 'Affected adversely' refers to actions as well as words.

Q Why has this decision been made; is it a legal requirement?

A For a number of years Delegates at Conference have raised concerns about under 18s attending Al-Anon meetings and asked the Board to seek advice. Professionals advised us that we should have a minimum age of 18 years as there have been claims brought against organisations from adults affected adversely as young people. Our Traditions cannot overrule professional advice or the law. The Board had to accept and act upon the advice from our Safeguarding Officer, our UK solicitors, Human Resources Background Checks (HRBC), as well as feedback from both the Alateen Committee and Conferences from previous years and discussions during Executive and GSB meetings.

Q Can young people stay in an Alateen, Al-Anon or AA Convention?

A Yes, Conventions are not affected as they are open public events which are not recognised as a regular weekly Al-Anon meeting. A completed consent form is required for young people, regardless of whether they are accompanied by a parent or guardian, to enable them to attend the Convention and open meetings within the Convention. However, if an Al-Anon closed meeting is held during the Convention the minimum age of attendance must be 18 years. The consent forms are available from the Alateen liaison person who is responsible for obtaining and holding these forms during the Convention.

Q How can Groups announce that there is a minimum age requirement at meetings?

A This can be discussed and agreed at a Group Conscience. One suggestion could be that at the beginning of each meeting the chair could announce that "the minimum age for attending an Al-Anon meeting is 18 years". This would avoid singling any one person out.

- Q Where can I get written information that states the minimum age requirement for attending an Al-Anon meeting be 18 years.
- A The Chairperson's Information Letter is available on the members' homepage of the website <https://al-anonuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Chairpersons-Information-Letter-No-81-January-2023-1.pdf>
- Q Parents/guardians have the legal responsibility for the young person so why can't young people attend an Al-Anon meeting with a parent/guardian?
- A The risk still remains that the Al-Anon/Alateen name could be brought into disrepute. Al-Anon/Alateen can still be held accountable for allowing parents/guardians to cause an adverse effect to the young person by bringing them to a meeting.
- Q Can young people attend an Al-Anon Group if they are accompanied by an Alateen Screened Group Sponsor?
- A No, the minimum age requirement for attending an Al-Anon meeting is 18 years. Young people can still be adversely affected by the adults in an Al-Anon meeting even if they are accompanied by an Alateen Screened Group Sponsor.
- Q Why are we calling ourselves 'Family Groups' when we are not able to support the whole family?
- A In 1951, two wives of AA members, Lois W and Anne B, sent a questionnaire to individuals and Groups, and as a result the name Al-Anon Family Groups was chosen. Alateen supports young people 12–17 year olds inclusive.
- Q Young people benefit by attending and participating at Al-Anon meetings. In some cases, Al-Anon meetings are preferable to Alateen for children 12-17 years, so how can we now support these young people?
- A We can point out the benefits and encourage young people to try Alateen. They can be given details of Conference Approved Literature and podcasts on the website.
- Q How would a Group handle a situation if an adult brought a young person/toddler/baby into the meeting?
- A This can be discussed and agreed at a Group Conscience. One suggestion could be that the meeting greeter or a couple of experienced members could explain to the adult, away from other members that there is a minimum age for attendance and give details of CAL and the website.
- Q If two Alateen Screened Group Sponsors do not attend the Alateen meeting as planned can the Alateens attend the Al-Anon meeting?
- A No, the minimum age requirement for attending an Al-Anon meeting is now 18 years. If all Alateens cannot leave the venue the Alateen Screened Group Sponsor can wait until the last member is collected.
- Q Is this decision not a contradiction of our Policies, Practices and CAL which state that young people over the age of 12 can attend an Al-Anon meeting?
- A This decision comes into effect immediately and documents will be updated over time.

Other points to consider:

- Groups could suggest to parents/guardians without babysitting facilities that they could go to an online meeting in the evening when the children are asleep.
- Groups could say to anyone under 18 years that “we can’t help you at this meeting, but you might find help via the UK & Eire website, our literature or in-person/online Alateen meetings”.
- Groups could provide some Conference Approved Literature (CAL) before the meeting starts.
- An Alateen Screened Group Sponsor shared that their home Group felt relieved to get clarity regarding young people in Al-Anon meetings.
- This is an opportunity to increase Alateen Groups