



July 2023

Al-Anon Family Groups UK & Eire
57B Great Suffolk St
London SE1 0BB
Office: 020 7593 2070

Minimum Age Requirement to attend Al-Anon Meetings Update

At the January 2023 General Service Board (GSB) meeting a motion was unanimously passed to introduce a minimum age requirement of 18 years to attend an Al-Anon meeting. This was a difficult decision and the Board agreed that it was necessary to include this item on future Board agendas to ensure that updates and discussions could continue. This will also be an agenda item at the UK & Eire Service Conference 2023.

At the June GSB meeting the Trustees reviewed and discussed correspondence received from the fellowship. Due to the emotional impact this decision has had on members it was decided to give further detailed information on the background of the decision and how Groups can manage this change.

Concerns regarding the responsibility placed upon Al-Anon members and the limitations on having a safe place for members, particularly newcomers, to share in Al-Anon meetings when young people attend were raised during UK & Eire Service Conferences in 1991 and 1996-2006. Current Concern Questions raised in 2010 and 2014, and feedback from the Alateen Committee at Conference 2018-2019 and 2022 also generated discussions from the floor of Conference.

Concerns regarding young people in Al-Anon have been raised over many years in the fellowship and have been discussed by both the GSB and the Executive Committee during this time. When the Safeguarding Working Party was set up in 2021 they also raised concerns. The Board's decision in January 2023 was taken following extensive discussions and consultations with professionals, as requested by members over the years. In accordance with the Concepts of Service the Board did not consider this matter was a motion for Conference as it was a legal matter rather than a Traditional one. The professionals will continue to work with Al-Anon to ensure that the Board and the fellowship are updated on an ongoing basis. The professionals who specialise in these areas and have worked with Al-Anon over many years, include solicitors and insurance providers in the UK and Ireland, Human Resources Background Checks (HRBC) who carry out the DBS (Disclosures and Barring Service) checks in England and Wales and an outsourced consultant Sandra Neville the Safeguarding Officer who provides support services regarding child safeguarding in different jurisdictions. Sandra has worked extensively since 2019 on the Al-Anon UK & Eire Safeguarding Policy.

All of these professionals have highlighted that the Board of Trustees has a legal responsibility to protect the charity and in line with all other organisations in the UK & Eire, to consider their responsibilities towards children and other vulnerable groups. The professionals have also instructed the Board that to reduce risk and ensure the safety of young people, members and the Al-Anon reputation, the minimum age requirement for attending an Al-Anon meeting should be 18 years. Anyone who can be seen and/or heard at an Al-Anon meeting is considered as being present in the Group. This does not include open public events (eg. a Convention or PI event) or business meetings (eg. Area Assemblies) as these are not considered to be part of

the self-help Groups that Al-Anon offers as a service to the public. If Al-Anon were to introduce a provision for an age band (eg. very young children attending with parents/guardians) this would require all adult members in the Group to be police checked or Garda vetted, which would result in newcomers being turned away from the meetings until they had completed police checks or Garda vetting. Al-Anon cannot ignore professional information and instructions. Traditions cannot overrule this or our legal responsibilities.

Other important points which were highlighted when considering this matter were:

- Claims have been brought against organisations from adults adversely affected as young people. Some claims from adults date back to when they were as young as two years old.
- Allegations regarding child safeguarding have been made in the UK & Eire Structure.
- Although young people may have experienced trauma living with alcoholism this should not be a reason to risk further trauma in a meeting.
- Online Al-Anon meetings provide opportunities for members with childcare issues to attend, however the child cannot be in the room.
- Young people are able to attend Alateen online meetings as well as Alateen in-person meetings which could lead to the growth of Alateen.

Groups may hold a conscience meeting to consider how they manage this change if a young person arrives for the meeting. Suggested ways could include:

- a statement could be read out at the start of a meeting such as “The minimum age for attending an Al-Anon meeting is 18 years. Alateen meetings are for young people between the ages of 12-17 inclusive. Helpful resources include podcasts, case studies and literature which can be found on our website al-anonuk.org.uk”
- appointing a greeter/s who could speak to the young person prior to the start of the meeting to give information regarding Alateen and the website.

The Board appreciates the feelings of members regarding this matter and hope this update provides further clarification. If members or Groups require further guidance they are encouraged to follow the normal channels of communication and contact their District Representative, Area Delegate or Regional Trustee.

Yours in fellowship

Karen

Karen Murdoch on behalf of the General Service Board (GSB)
Chairperson, GSB