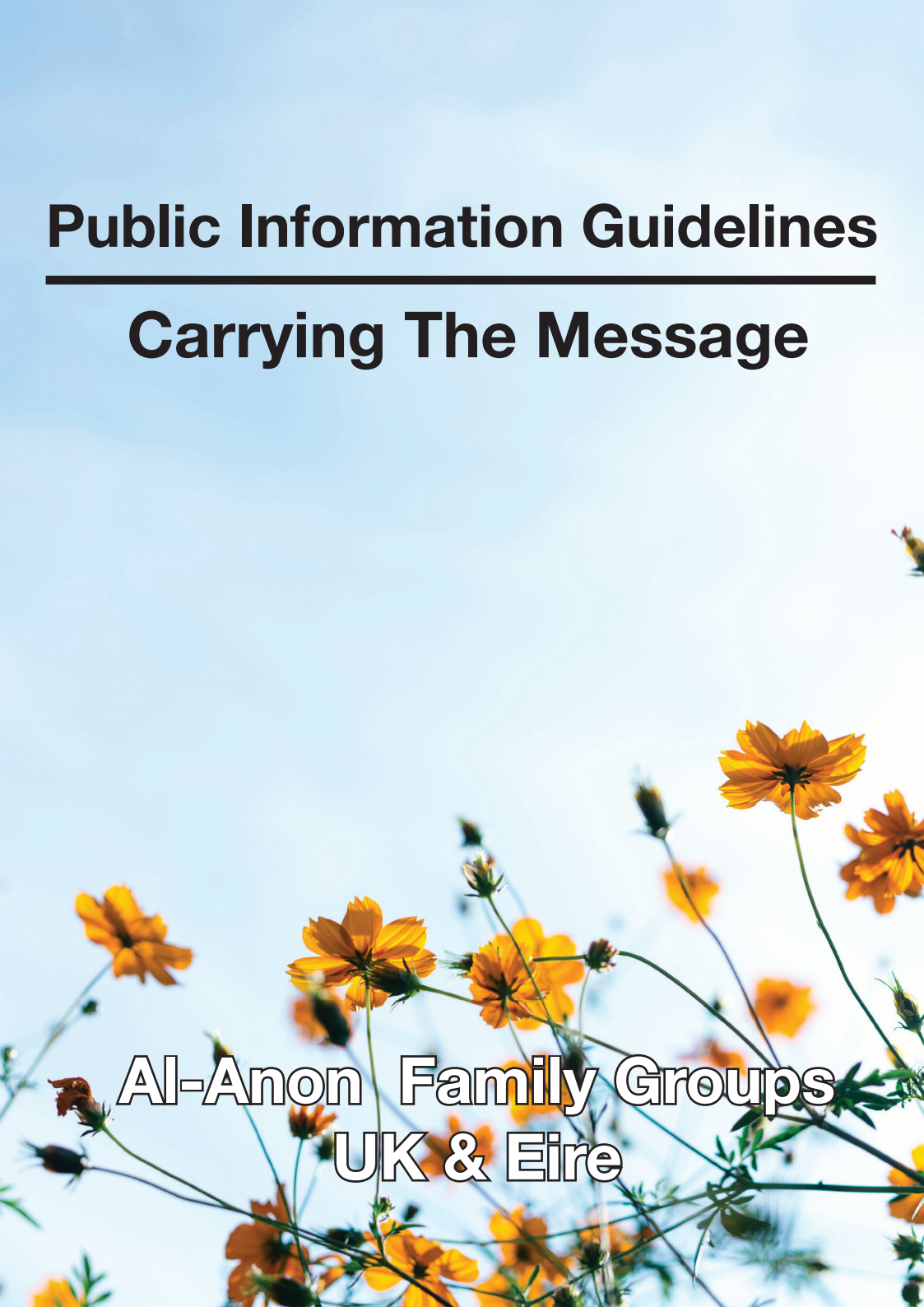




Public Information Guidelines

Carrying The Message

Al-Anon Family Groups
UK & Eire

It is the consensus of the sixth World Service Conference that if Al-Anon is to continue to exist, it must continue to grow. There is no standing still without retrogression. Al-Anon must continue to grow if it is going to fulfil its primary purpose of reaching millions who need Al-Anon's help but are not yet aware of the existence of our fellowship.

Why PI?

It is said that for every problem drinker there are many others, family, friends, co-workers, directly affected by the alcoholic's drinking. Most remain invisible and isolated, unaware of the help available from Al-Anon Family Groups. Public Information (PI) enables us to reach out directly to these people and their families.

Many of us found Al-Anon via other organisations. This is why informing diverse organisations, services and professionals about who we are and what we do is a valuable way of carrying the message to those who need our fellowship.

The following guidelines are based on the shared experiences of Al-Anon members who have undertaken Public Information work. They are intended as a source of information and advice for any member wishing to make a contribution to informing the public.

PI informs people who we are, what we do, and how they can contact us.

Carrying the spiritual message of the Twelve Steps to others affected by someone else's drinking is a vital part of our own recovery. We are reminded that 'we can only keep it by giving it away'.

Easy does it but do it!

Who Does It?

Simple answer - we all do!

The best person for the job is a willing member of the fellowship with an understanding of our Steps and Traditions. From a single individual passing on our business card, to sharing your story with a professional, to the entire fellowship joining in the co-ordinated effort of a UK & Eire campaign, every contribution is significant.

Carrying the Al-Anon message is an important part of recovery for every one of us, and by working together effectively we can improve the reach of our public information work. UK & Eire campaigns are led by our General Service Office (GSO), local PI drives can be organised at Area, District or Group level, but a single member's undertaking is just as valuable and important to Al-Anon.

Individuals

There are many ways in which we can increase awareness of Al-Anon as individual group members, for example:

- Talk to your doctor or practice nurse about the benefits Al-Anon has brought to our lives.
- Request that a poster/banner and perhaps some PI literature be displayed in the waiting area of a medical practice, local library, police station, church, local community centre or local supermarket.
- Ask local retailers and newsagents to display our postcard (UK93) (usually for a small fee).
- Leave the Al-Anon postcard or business card (UK20) in public places or pin it to community notice boards. Carry a couple just in case there is an opportunity to pass it on.
- Write to your local newspaper/magazine or parish magazine, email or call your local radio station. Offer to share your story (anonymously).
- Respond to press, internet or broadcast features by providing details of our organisation (right of reply).

Groups

- Groups may elect a PI Person, a contact who communicates with the Area PI Co-ordinator/Area Delegate and conveys PI notices to the group.
- A PI Person may encourage members to distribute literature to counsellors, doctors' surgeries, health centres and solicitors' offices. Groups could submit articles or interviews to local media.
- Meeting venues range from church halls to hospitals and psychiatric units where there may be opportunities to display posters, banners or leaflets and for members to speak to resident professionals or client groups.
- Groups may ask AA members to attend their open meetings.
- Local organisations will often run events or awareness days, providing an opportunity for Al-Anon members to offer/display a stall of literature and speak to the public.

Districts

- A District PI Co-ordinator can inspire groups to work together to carry out the District PI plans.
- Districts may contact larger organisations, such as local health bodies, and workplaces.
- PI can provide a regular focus for District meetings. Some Districts have their own PI Committee to share ideas, best practice and co-ordinate work, as well as gather a list of the PI work that has been done to report to the PI Co-ordinator or GSO.

Areas

- The Area PI Co-ordinator acts as an important link between GSO and the groups. GSO receives enquiries from a variety of professionals and responds with literature and/or other information. All PI opportunities arising from such contacts, including requests for speakers and invitations to events are forwarded to the relevant PI Co-ordinators.
- Area PI Co-ordinators receive regular reports from their Districts and Groups and are encouraged to update GSO on local PI initiatives.

- They are encouraged to maintain a list and approach experienced and willing local members who are prepared to be interviewed by local and national media or to speak at public meetings/events.

GSO

- All national media coverage is dealt with by GSO, which also handles communication with government bodies, parliaments and other key national organisations. So, if you have an idea with national implications, it is important to let GSO know.
- Various PI resources are available on the Al-Anon UK and Eire website (www.al-anonuk.org.uk), such as template letters, downloadable posters, case studies/podcasts, Monthly Focus calendar and much more. The website is managed at GSO.
- For those preparing their own material it is advisable to consult GSO for accuracy and alignment with the Traditions.

The Where, When And How

. . . entirely depends on you, your ideas, ambition, and resources. Whether you want to reach out to your local community or be involved in a nationwide campaign, the principles are the same. We find the basis for guidance in our Steps and Traditions, particularly in Tradition Eleven.

Public Information and Tradition Eleven

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members.

Attraction in Al-Anon means sharing how the programme works for us, thereby showing how it can work for others. We attract when we show our recovery in the way we behave. We attract when we convey that Al-Anon and Alateen groups are friendly, warm and non-judgmental.

Promotion suggests a ‘hard sell’, profit and promises of a definite outcome. This is not in line with Al-Anon’s Traditions.

Anonymity is the essential factor which makes our meetings a safe place in which to recover. When we leave our surnames, and all other labels outside the rooms we can focus on our common problems in the knowledge that our anonymity will be respected and that what we share will not be repeated.

It does not mean that we can't tell people we are in Al-Anon. Our personal anonymity is ours to break if we choose. If we wish we can tell family, friends, associates or professionals that we are members of Al-Anon. However, we never talk about the people we meet in Al-Anon to anyone outside the fellowship.

Equally, we need to safeguard the anonymity of AA members, including the problem drinkers in our own lives. If we prefer, in order to protect identity outside of Al-Anon, we can choose to use first names only, or use a pseudonym.

Finally, it is essential that we maintain our personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, TV and even social media. This provides potential members with the confidence that their anonymity will also be protected.

Meeting the Public

Open Meetings

Al-Anon Open Meetings can be attended by anyone over the age of 18 years who is interested in Al-Anon Family Groups. They provide an opportunity for professionals and other people to see how an Al-Anon meeting works. Inviting two or three professionals to a meeting specifically declared 'Open' can provide an effective introduction to our fellowship. Remember to give regular group members plenty of notice.

Taking a Meeting to Others

Introductory Meetings can be held at institutions, such as hospitals, prisons, treatment centres and shelters, or any other location where families and friends of problem drinkers gather.

Attendance changes frequently. Such a meeting is not considered an Al-Anon group and does not have its own Group Representative.

Experienced Al-Anon members share the responsibilities for conducting Introductory Meetings and for inviting those in attendance to try a regular Al-Anon/Alateen meeting.

Al-Anon groups, directly or through their District/Area, are encouraged to help with the cost of literature and other expenses for Introductory Meetings. Members must comply with the security requirements of the meeting location.

Members share:

“It was impressive to see a prisoner realise they had been affected by their parents’ drinking and how they in turn were affecting the lives of their own partner and children”.

“When I was sharing my own story to patients in a rehabilitation programme, it was they who pointed out that I had suffered mental abuse for years!”

Supplying a Speaker

There are many community-based groups, such as Rotary Clubs, Women's Institutes, or other organisations who welcome speakers. GP surgeries have education sessions for staff and Al-Anon can be offered as a subject. Some churches and faith communities hold meetings to consider topics relevant to health and well-being. It is also important that we make Al-Anon Family Groups known to the professionals who deal with the social consequences of problem drinking, i.e., the police, social workers and healthcare professionals.

Al-Anon members may be invited to speak at Public Meetings or PI activities organised by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Speaking in schools and colleges/universities

Children and young people can be very receptive to the Alateen/Al-Anon message, particularly if they are directly affected by the drinking of a family member or a friend. Through PI in schools/colleges and universities we can plant a seed of hope which could prove crucial to surviving an alcoholic relationship.

Working with your local Alateen Co-ordinator may be helpful when doing PI with young people who qualify for Alateen meetings (age 12-17 inclusive). Universities will often have opportunities for Al-Anon members to hold a PI stall during events such as Freshers' Week or Health Week. Staff might also benefit from learning about Al-Anon Family Groups.

Members have spoken at school assemblies, to individual classes and groups of students/trainees.

Public Meetings

Public meetings can be held in addition to the regular Group meeting either online or in person, with invitations offered to interested people including professionals. The speakers may be Al-Anon members or professionals who have direct knowledge of the benefits of Al-Anon Family Groups.

It is essential to plan well in advance so that professionals can schedule the meeting in their diaries. The project should be discussed first at the Group business meeting and a committee can be formed.

When a project which will cover an area wider than the Group's immediate locality is undertaken, the District and Area should be informed and surrounding Groups given the opportunity to participate.

What to consider:

- be clear about the target audience and your objectives
- ensure you have the means to carry through your plans, i.e., finance and willing members
- make it as easy as possible for your audience to attend, for example, professionals prefer day/lunchtime meetings, and a simple lunch can add to the convenience of an accessible venue.

Tips for Public Information speakers

When you are ready to speak to outside organisations, let your Group, District, Area PI Co-ordinator and GSO know that you are available. If you have never spoken in public before, it is a good idea to accompany an experienced speaker to an event and help out answering questions from the audience or prepare to share some of your own story. If you have any questions, email pi@al-anonuk.org.uk.

Careful preparation will help to build your confidence.

Consult UKG15 'Members Interested in Speaking' for further information.

When you are asked to speak to an outside organisation make sure you have all the relevant details:

- *topic*
- *length of talk*
- *will there be questions or general discussion*
- *what time you should arrive*
- *what resources are available at the venue e.g., laptop and projector*
- *exchange contact numbers in case of emergencies*

Once these details are clear, start to **plan your talk**. This might include the following points:

- *that you are expressing your own views and not those of Al-Anon Family Groups as a whole*
- *the qualification for membership*
- *that it is possible to be in Al-Anon whether the alcoholic is still drinking or not*
- *the need to focus on your own life and not that of the drinker*

- *what ‘denial’ means*
- *the effect on children*
- *that it is useless reasoning with someone who is drunk*
- *that changed attitudes in the family towards a drinking problem can aid recovery*
- *what ‘loving detachment’ and ‘letting go’ mean*

You may also wish to **clarify** that Al-Anon:

- *maintains confidentiality and anonymity*
- *has a Twelve Step spiritual programme but is not religious*
- *has no membership fees because it is self-supporting through its members’ voluntary contributions*
- *keeps no membership records*

Remember that your audience will want to know what it is like living with alcoholism, so this is your chance to tell your story. Avoid using Al-Anon jargon, as it can be confusing or off putting to a newcomer/professional. Include your situation prior to Al-Anon, how you found out about Al-Anon and how Al-Anon has helped you. Illustrate this with examples from your life prior to and after recovery!

Members share:

“Sadly, three years ago I found out that my ex-husband died of a heart attack without ever finding sobriety. After his death, I only coped because of Al-Anon. I grieved him in my meetings and would cry. My daughter also found it tough. She was 15 years old when he died. It helped that we supported each other.

Al-Anon is a major part of my life today and gives me the tools to deal with each day. Although I haven’t lived with alcoholism for many years, I continue to attend meetings, and I am grateful for the support I have received.”

Approaching the Local Media

As part of raising awareness of Al-Anon Family Groups, why not contact your local radio station, magazine or newspaper and let them know of the effects of alcoholism on families and friends?

Journalists are always looking for interesting stories from locals – that's you! Your local newspapers and broadcasters rely on you getting in touch with them – they are particularly keen on human interest stories with an important message for their readers, listeners and viewers.

Contacting editors

Prior to contacting journalists, it's essential to think about potential outcomes. Being prepared will help ensure that you are able to deliver what the journalist is looking for.

Do some research – check your local magazine/newspaper for features, lifestyle stories and real-life stories.

Make a note of which reporters and broadcasters do 'human interest' stories and interviews.

Alternatively ask if you could include a small ad in their next issue.

Ask yourself – Am I comfortable to share my story? If so, once the journalist has agreed to do the piece, remember to mention the importance of maintaining your anonymity. Even though you will be using your personal email address/contact number to contact them, journalists will not publish your personal information.

Ask the journalist –

- *When is the deadline?*
- *How many words (approximately) would you need?*
- *Are you looking for the piece to be written from a specific angle?*
- *This will give you a better idea of what is expected by the editor. Writing a piece for a newspaper/magazine is easier for Al-Anon members as it allows you to maintain your anonymity by using a pseudonym.*

Use your 'right of reply' to respond to media articles about alcoholism.

- *Send a letter to the editor of a local or national newspaper*
- *Send an email or text to a specific radio or television programme*
- *Register a comment on a newspaper/magazine website*



Local radio

You can write to your local radio station and suggest that they do a feature on the effects of alcoholism/problem drinking on the families and friends. This is your opportunity to share your experience of living with an alcoholic/problem drinker; how it affected you and how Al-Anon has helped you.

Do some research – Listen to your local radio station and identify which journalists might be most receptive to stories about the effects of alcoholism/problem drinking on families and friends.

If your local radio agrees to do a feature, here are some questions for you to ask –

- *When do you need to do the interview?*
- *Will it be live or pre-recorded?*
- *Will my anonymity be maintained by using a pseudonym?*

It might be useful to find out what the name/theme of the programme will be to help you to prepare appropriately for your share.

Some journalists may try to ask for opinions on political issues, which goes against Al-Anon Tradition Ten, if so it's important to mention that you can only talk about your own experiences.

Note – Journalists don't like attachments on emails. When you send over the press release, copy and paste the text into the body of the email and tell them you have a photo for them to use. Only send over the photo to the newspaper when they've asked for it and will be expecting it. For a photo of one of our illustrations, email GSO at pi@al-anonuk.org.uk.

If you get a piece of coverage in the media, please share your success with us at GSO and email a link to pi@al-anonuk.org.uk.

Members share:

“I felt quite nervous sitting in a radio studio with headphones on. The presenter was very enthusiastic about Al-Anon and I soon felt comfortable”.

“Having the courage to go on a live radio show made me realise how much my self-esteem and confidence have developed, and how much my recovery is worth sharing”.

“After I had done my radio interview I thought of all the things I ‘should’ have said. When I listened back I felt a real buzz at how well I carried the Al-Anon message”.

Essential PI Tools

PI Plan

A rolling Public Information Plan can help to spread the work across the year, keeping PI work at the forefront of our minds and enabling us to plan ahead. It is a good idea to refresh posters and review contacts regularly, demonstrating a consistent local presence and organised approach. There are dates when our messages may have particular resonance, such as the weeks immediately after the Christmas holidays or during Alcohol Awareness Week. Use the Monthly Focus Calendar for ideas and tips.

Posters

Posters are meant to be arresting and eye catching. They should carry accurate, consistent information about Al-Anon Family Groups. As well as ready-printed posters (available from the shop) further poster designs can be downloaded from the members' area of the website

(<https://al-anonuk.org.uk/getting-help/downloadable-pi-posters/>).

It is important to ask permission to display a poster or Public Information postcard. This maintains the credibility of our organisation. It will also be an opportunity to make someone else aware of who we are and what we do.

An Area can produce its own flyer, to advertise a group for example. Awareness of copyright laws and restrictions is essential. The UK & Eire PI Committee encourages members to submit their final designs to GSO for advice on the use of the Al-Anon logo and accurate presentation of our contact details.

Whilst posters may provide the Al-Anon website address and contact information, members should not include personal contact details. It is essential to check with your venue provider before including details of your meeting place on notices.

Copyright

It is important that all individuals, Groups, Districts and Areas respect the copyright of the World Service Office when developing PI resources. Copyright considerations apply to all Al-Anon symbols, including the circle within a triangle logo.

Further information is available in the Al-Anon Family Groups UK & Eire Service Manual. If in doubt, please contact GSO for advice.

PI Literature

PI literature is available via the UK & Eire Al-Anon website (www.al-anonuk.org.uk). This includes our PI magazines, posters, business cards, postcards and leaflets for professionals and the public.

You may wish to encourage professionals or relevant organisations to purchase PI literature to pass on to their clients. It can also be helpful to provide one or two leaflets whenever making contact with anyone willing and able to carry our message, or simply direct them to the website shop.

Copies of Al-Anon's PI magazine or PI leaflets can be left in doctors' waiting rooms, libraries or other facilities where members of the public seek advice. The PI Bundle (UK128) will allow you to create five PI packs for professionals. Remember always to seek permission, we don't want to risk causing annoyance and have our resources end up in the bin.

PI Notice Board

Districts and Areas may have a PI literature display board, ready-populated with posters and leaflets. This is a cost-effective way to add impact to a stall at a health fair or other event. It can provide a useful temporary display in libraries, Citizens Advice Bureau, hospitals or other support organisations, and may be stocked with take-away literature.

PI Presentations

A PI presentation to professionals is available to download from the members' area of the website.

Advertising

Advertising is a perfectly acceptable way to reach out to others, provided this is always based upon attraction rather than promotion. It is important to weigh the costs and benefits of paid advertising. A well-written letter or article accepted for publication, or a social media post shared by somebody with a big following may prove more informative and have a greater readership.

Emails

Sending an email is an effective way to carry our message to local organisations. Some groups prepare a letter which is emailed for circulation to local counselling services, churches, and/or other places of worship. Offering information and, perhaps, a speaker. It is a good idea to keep emails short and to the point.

Emphasising the UK & Eire Al-Anon website address (www.al-anonuk.org.uk) is also a great way to point people in our direction.

Website

The UK & Eire Al-Anon website is one of our greatest Public Information assets. Our website address (www.al-anonuk.org.uk) should feature prominently in all our communications and presentations.

Social Media

Al-Anon is on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Social networking can be an important venue for carrying the message of Al-Anon as it fulfils its primary purpose of reaching millions who are not yet aware of the existence of our fellowship.

Members using social media should consider their own anonymity as well as the alcoholics when posting Al-Anon related information.

More information about using social media in Al-Anon can be found on the website under the tabs Members' area > Public Information.

AI-Anon Family Groups 2024 ®

