

Guidelines

The Shared Experience of Al-Anon Members

Safety in Al-Anon Meetings

Safety is an important issue within Al-Anon. Open discussion on the topic can help Groups develop workable solutions to safety issues—solutions based on the fundamental principles of our fellowship. This document applies to Al-Anon meetings, Groups and members. For Alateen meetings, the requirements are set out in the Safeguarding Children Policy UK and Safeguarding Children Policy Eire.



When members feel safe and are safe at meetings, the unity of our Groups (Tradition One) is maintained and Al-Anon can fulfil its primary purpose.

For Al-Anon members to feel safe in meetings and talking with their Sponsors they need to be able to trust each other. By attending Al-Anon meetings we benefit other members and ourselves when they provide a safe place to focus on gaining and maintaining serenity. The Group can then fulfil its primary purpose—to help families and friends of alcoholics. For this reason, it is recommended that Groups and members discuss the topic of safety.

Autonomy and Group Action

Although there is no government within Al-Anon, legal or otherwise to control or direct the behaviour of Al-Anon members, Al-Anon is not granted immunity under the law. In accordance with Tradition Four, the formation and operation of an Al-Anon Group is guided by the Group Conscience of its members. Al-Anon Groups and service entities such as Areas, Districts and Al-Anon Information Service Offices are autonomous, except in matters affecting another Group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.

Al-Anon Membership

Anyone over the age of 18 years who has a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend may attend an Al-Anon meeting. This brings an openness that helps define our character as a diverse fellowship; however, some people come into Al-Anon without an understanding of the appropriate behaviour in meetings or in the company of other members. A person can find serenity in Al-Anon and yet still not understand what is acceptable behaviour.

Dealing with Disruptions

While most Groups operate with a healthy balance of spontaneity and structure, there are some situations that can threaten Group unity and challenge the safety of the Group and its members. Often these can centre on disruptive individuals. Some Groups have developed plans for addressing disruptive behaviour through their Group Consciences to ensure that the Group's welfare is protected. Disruptive behaviour can be pre-empted by the Chairperson stating the expectations for behaviour in the meeting.

Group Safety and Unity



Unacceptable behaviours include: sexual harassment or stalking; threats of violence; bullying; high-pressure controlling behaviour; financial coercion; racial, sexual, or gender intolerance and dominance. These behaviours could offend or pressure Al-Anon members to accept a particular point of view or belief on outside issues. In addition, there may be other behaviours that go on outside of typical meeting times that affect whether someone feels safe enough to return to the Group.

As a last resort, the disruptive member may be asked to stop attending the meeting for a specific period of time to maintain the unity of the Al-Anon Group.

In any situation, if a person's safety is in jeopardy, or the situation breaches the law, the members involved can take appropriate action to ensure their safety. Calling the proper authorities does not go against any Al-Anon Traditions. Anonymity is not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behaviour which must be reported if disclosed.

Victims of inappropriate behaviour, harassment or predatory behaviour can let the Group know about such situations, often through a Sponsor or trusted friend. This way the Group is informed, and members can help address the situation and curtail further problems. Group discussion should focus on how to create an environment where all family members and friends of alcoholics can find and maintain serenity.

Emergencies

Injuries, accidents, fires, etc., sometimes do occur during meetings. Addressing an emergency situation is more important than continuing the meeting, and members should not hesitate to call the emergency services in critical situations.

Keeping the Focus on Our Primary Purpose

Tradition Five states: “Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.” When members maintain order and safety in meetings, the Group as a whole benefits, and all those involved are able to focus on recovering from the family disease of alcoholism and learning how to live a serene life.

Ultimately, the experience of how these situations are handled can be as varied as our fellowship. Using good judgment and common sense, while following the Twelve Traditions, seems to provide the best guide.

What Can Groups and Members Do?

Groups and members can discuss the topic of safety to raise awareness in the fellowship and seek through sponsorship, workshops and meetings, to create as safe an environment as possible for the newcomer and other members or potential members. This can be the subject of sharing in Groups, Districts and Areas.

Here are some helpful suggestions and reminders:

- Talk about issues of safety before they arise.
- Include “Safety in Al-Anon” in a Group Inventory.
- Each member is responsible for safety.
- The Chairperson can communicate clearly what Al-Anon is and what it is not.

- Sponsors can be helpful in pointing out warning signs or unhealthy situations to those they sponsor and newcomers.
- Al-Anon members who are concerned about the words or actions of a Sponsor or another member may find it helpful to speak to someone they trust in their Al-Anon Group or a professional, as needed.
- Groups may benefit from developing guidelines and procedures on safety.

In all discussions about safety, keep the focus on our primary purpose and our common welfare, and place principles above personalities.

A Special Word to Anyone Confronted with Violence

Al-Anon’s gentle process unfolds gradually, over time. But anyone facing violent, potentially life-threatening situations may have to make immediate choices to ensure the safety of themselves and any children in the home.

It is not necessary to decide how to resolve the situation once and for all—only how to get out of harm’s way until they are able to make choices for themselves about their future.

Anyone who has been mentally, physically or sexually abused may be terrified of taking action at all. It can require every ounce of courage and faith to act decisively. But no one has to accept violence. We all deserve to be safe.

Helpful Resources for Al-Anon Members and Groups

- The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage (A7).
- In All Our Affairs: Making Crises Work for You (A14).
- From Survival to Recovery: Growing Up in an Alcoholic Home (A8).
- Sponsorship, What It’s All About (UK44).
- Conflict Resolution using the Twelve Traditions (UK101).
- Conflict Resolution (UK100).
- Sponsorship—Working Together to Recover (UK94).
- Taking a Group Inventory (UKG1).
- District and Area.

