



AL-ANON
Information Service Office of Orange County
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April 20, 2010

Dear Friends,

Among other things, the Orange County Intergroup Service Board is responsible for the operation of our Information Service Office and the publication of Al-Anon meetings in our area. In response to several complaints from Al-Anon members, the Board made the decision recently to remove some meetings from our Directory and website. This decision was based on serious and legitimate concerns for the welfare of present and future Al-Anon members. Ultimately, the Board decided to delist four meetings whose practices are not representative of Al-Anon as a whole.

The determination to delist the meetings was based on a great deal of thought and discussion, as well as the study of and reliance upon Al-Anon's Twelve Traditions and Concepts. The action was not punitive in nature, but an acknowledgement of fundamental differences in ideology and practice.

The Twelve Concepts supplied guidance in a more general way by providing a larger picture in which to view Al-Anon principles:

1. Responsibility / Guidance vs. Dominance
2. Accountability / Spiritual Basis for the Fellowship – Responsibility to Ourselves
3. Right of Decision / Mutual Trust
4. Participation
5. Rights of Appeal and Petition / Cooperation & Security
6. Administrative Responsibility / Accountability
7. Legal vs. Traditional Rights / Balance
8. Vision
9. Leadership
10. Responsibility is Balanced / No One Governs in Al-Anon
11. Equality & Fairness Preserve Al-Anon's Unity
12. Responsibility / Prudence / Freedom

As stated in the 2009 Conference Summary, page 23, in the Policy Committee report: “The procedure for working with any group that violates the Traditions includes the possibility that an Information Service or district could remove meetings causing serious problems from the local meeting list while working with such groups to come to a resolution.”

This letter will detail the concerns of the Board, cite applicable references to service tools, and specify actions the groups must take to be considered for reinstatement on the meeting schedule.

Below is a list of practices that, whether expressed overtly or covertly, do not adhere to Al-Anon Principles.

- A. Dictatorial behavior / controlling groups
 - o Group control of sponsorship, rigidity with rules of sponsorship, governing vs. trusted servant
 - o Authority based on individual’s time in group and status, “Lieutenants”
 - o Assignment and reassignment of sponsors
 - o Severe consequences associated with saying “No” to sponsor’s request
 - o Phone lists ordered by time in group rather than by name
 - o All Fourth Steps must be done the same way
 - o Atmosphere of direction and control
 - o Must read Big Book with sponsor before working Steps to be in Al-Anon
 - o Must attend specific meetings
 - o Who can (or must) share at meetings, and in what order
 - o What Conference Approved Literature to read or not, Blueprint for Progress and How Al-Anon Works not to be used
 - o Imposition of dress code
 - o New member kicked-out of meeting and told not to return

Tradition Two: “For our group purpose there is but one authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants – they do not govern.”

Tradition Nine: “Our groups, as such, ought never be organized...”

“Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover” bookmark: “Sponsorship is a confidential relationship between two Al-Anon members who benefit from sharing experience, strength, and hope. The intimate details exchanged strengthen the bonds of compassion, acceptance, and understanding. This private relationship is focused on the Al-Anon principles. Making a commitment to this special relationship, or letting go of the relationship, is a personal choice.”

Service Manual: “Other Literature at Meetings/Outside Publications,” p 94: “It is well to remember that A.A. literature is written for and from the viewpoint of alcoholics and is not Al-Anon/Alateen Conference Approved Literature. Reliance on opinions expressed in A.A. and other publications can distort the Al-Anon approach, particularly for the newcomer.”

One of the three obstacles to success in Al-Anon is dominance. In Al-Anon, we have no authority figures. The First Step has taught us that we have no power over anyone but ourselves. We are reminded to place principles above personalities and be a fellowship of equals. You can amend this violation through strict adherence to Tradition Two.

Although the focus of Tradition Eleven refers to the public representation of Al-Anon, it stresses that we remain anonymous in order to keep from having an elevated status or being considered a “spokesperson”– cautions that easily translate to behavior at the personal or group level.

The bookmark Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover was written in response to problems with controlling groups. If these behaviors were, in fact, limited to a few individuals rather than group policies, the group would still bear responsibility for keeping its meeting healthy. All Al-Anon members are welcome at all meetings; unless there is a serious problem with disruptive behavior, members are not banned. You must make all members welcome and offer alternatives rather than mandate compliance.

- B. Sponsor or group involvement with matters that are outside the scope of Al-Anon
 - o Getting involved with members’ medical decisions - for example, the use of anti-depressants
 - o Marital/dating decisions, the pairing and un-pairing of members with others, interference with personal relationships
 - o Living situations, organization of group houses and house rules
 - o High pressure for contribution of hall dues to support meeting facility
 - o High pressure to attend other non-Al-Anon meetings

Tradition Eight: “Al-Anon Twelfth Step work should remain forever non-professional...”

“Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover” bookmark: “Sponsorship is... A commitment to practice healthy communication – not based on intimidation or demands... An experience based on unconditional love, not shame or judgment.” *We do not act as experts, and are cautioned not to involve ourselves with making decisions for others. On the contrary, we are encouraged to help each other find our own answers in our own time. Those who sponsor do have personal discretion about whom they agree to sponsor. A group policy, however, to refuse to sponsor anyone on anti-depressants and/or instruct any individual to stop using prescribed medication as a condition of being a group member is an unacceptable and potentially dangerous practice. In order to amend this violation, the groups must not interfere in any way with members’ medical decisions.*

Guidance never imposes a decision on someone else or dictates an action. Any orchestration of personal relationships, or living circumstances, defies the Al-Anon credo not to make decisions which affect the lives of others, particularly about family situations. To amend this violation, the groups must not have any involvement in members’ personal relationships or living arrangements.

There are no dues or fees for Al-Anon membership. Contributions are not voluntary when there are negative consequences for non-compliance. In order to amend this violation, the groups must cease the practice of posting member’s names and amount of money contributed; personal criticism; and excluding those members from the groups’ activities (taking of birthday cake at hall, removal of coffee cup) associated with the payment of “hall dues.”

Similarly, attendance is not voluntary when there are negative consequences for non-compliance. Members are never required to attend meetings. In order to amend this violation, members must never be subjected to pressure, criticism or punishment in relation to their attendance of any meeting, whether part of Al-Anon Family Groups or not.

- C. Separation from the Al-Anon community as a whole
 - o Telling members which meetings to attend, who they can or cannot talk to or associate with
 - o Communicating that other Al-Anon meetings “do not work a good program” or are “sick”
 - o Requiring members to travel together
 - o Requiring members to support the group by recruiting new members from panels and other meetings

- o Operating as a closed rather than open system, instilling fear of dire consequences for leaving the group

Tradition One: “Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.”

“Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover” bookmark: “Sponsorship is... An agreement to recover and grow together; not to struggle in isolation.”

Service Manual: “Concept Four: Participation is the Key to Harmony,” p 176: “Participation also responds to our spiritual needs. All of us deeply desire to belong. The Al-Anon ideal of a working partnership could never regard any member as second class... It assures us that we are truly the “trusted servants” described in Al-Anon’s Tradition Two.”

The separation of these groups from others is their own choice. That they identify themselves by another name [Gottawanna] indicates a desire or belief that they are unique, as does an earlier attempt to hold their own convention. One of our program’s Legacies is Unity. It cannot be denied that years of this division and accompanying animosity have affected our Al-Anon community as a whole.

Periodically, Al-Anon members will contact the Information Service Office asking for help when they feel the character of their meeting beginning to change. They may be aware that their meeting is being taken over, or that recruiting of members is going on. The practice of farming or recruiting members from panels or other meetings is not in the spirit of “attraction rather than promotion.” The Board intends to provide support when it becomes aware of these occurrences.

When we focus on our common purpose, we benefit from the experience of being part of the entire fellowship of Al-Anon. There are approximately 150 meetings per week in Orange County. In order to amend these violations, the four delisted meetings must conform to Al-Anon’s First Tradition, as well as exhibit the mutual cooperation and trust the rest of our Al-Anon community enjoys.

D. Unsafe environment

- o Anonymity not respected, members disclose other member’s personal information from the podium
- o Personal information of sponsee exchanged between sponsor and others
- o Members abandoned by the group, practice of shunning

Tradition Twelve: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.”

Tradition Five: “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.”

Another of the three obstacles to success in Al-Anon is gossip. At the beginning of every meeting, in the Suggested Welcome, we are reminded: “Anonymity is an important principle of the Al-Anon program. Everything that is said here, in the group meeting and member-to-member, must be held in confidence. Only in this way can we feel free to say what is in our minds and hearts, for this is how we help one another in Al-Anon.” In order to amend this violation, confidentiality and anonymity must be respected.

Personal information of a sponsee should never be exchanged between a sponsor and others. Honoring the inviolability of the sponsor/sponsee relationship is paramount. To amend this violation, all group members must follow Al-Anon guidelines regarding sponsorship.

When members leave these groups, or fail to do something required of them, they run the risk of being shunned. Rejection is contrary to our one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. To amend this violation, members must neither ostracize nor threaten to ostracize members for unwanted behavior.

E. Affiliation with outside enterprises

- 7th Tradition funds given to battered women’s shelter
- Support of facility through hall dues, in addition to rent paid through 7th Tradition collections
- Involvement with group houses

Service Manual: “Use of Group Funds: Donations to Outside Agencies,” p 88:
“Contributions to any outside agency, activity, or program are not to be made from group funds, which are to be used for Al-Anon/Alateen purposes only.”

Tradition Three: “The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation...”

Tradition Six: “Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim...”

Tradition Ten: “The Al-Anon Family Groups have no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

Al-Anon does not support other causes or facilities. We do not procure housing for members, assign living arrangements, or dictate house rules. Being involved with enterprises outside of Al-Anon, even if somehow related to the disease of alcoholism, indicates that welcoming the families of alcoholics is not a group's sole purpose, thereby diverting us "from our primary spiritual aim."

In order to amend these violations, the groups must use group funds for Al-Anon purposes alone. In addition, they must cease association with any current group houses and refrain from involving themselves in decisions regarding members' living arrangements in the future.

In conclusion, it is neither the Board's wish nor intention to punish or abandon our members. On the contrary, through its group conscience, the Service Board determined that it has a responsibility to the entire membership, present and potential, to protect the unity of our fellowship. When prompted by the membership, the Board took very thoughtful action in order to address a situation of such disparity that it could no longer be ignored.

Citing group autonomy, some groups choose to conduct their meetings in ways that vary from the practices set out in the Service Manual (for example, displaying flyers for non-conference approved activities). In this instance, however, there is a list of practices which are not advocated by our Service Manual, and not representative of Al-Anon's Principles, Concepts and Traditions. An argument could not be supported that these are autonomous decisions, since the group conscience of Al-Anon, through the Conference, has set these policies already.

We share the responsibility for protecting and preserving the character of our fellowship, for being sources of help and hope to those affected by alcoholism, and for accurately representing the Principles of our program to the world at large.

Per Concept Five, the rights of appeal and petition are available: "The rights of appeal and petition protect minorities and assure that they be heard."

Please keep the First Tradition in mind. "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity."

Yours in service,

Doon R., Chairman
On behalf of the Orange County Intergroup Service Board

