


Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism 2016

*Strength and hope for families and friends
of problem drinkers*

A close-up photograph of a woman with long brown hair and bangs, looking directly at the camera through a window frame. Her face is partially obscured by the frame, and her expression is serious and contemplative. The lighting is soft, coming from the window, highlighting her features.

What can you do when
someone close to you
drinks too much?

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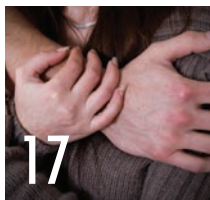
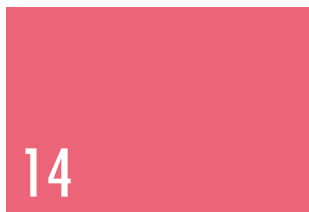
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Recovery for family members helps the drinker's recovery

Cynthia Moreno-Tuohy, BSW, NCACII, SAP



Dear Reader,

Living with an active alcoholic is lonely, devastating, and confusing. Equally destructive is growing up with an alcoholic or living with a family member who grew up in alcoholism, but didn't seek help. The loss of self-esteem causes family members to doubt their own capabilities—and even their senses—when people feel compelled to deny that they heard yelling, saw fighting, or suffered abuse.

Keeping the secret of our abuse can be overwhelming, yet we aren't allowed to talk about it in the family or outside. Families are taught not to discuss what goes on in the house with anyone else. Doing so is regarded as a violation to the family and a sign of disloyalty.

So the idea of going to an Al-Anon meeting and talking with others about how to minimize the damage of alcoholism in our own lives seems impossible. After all, how could talking to strangers help? What if I see someone I know, or what if someone tells my family what I said? All of these are common questions that individuals have before taking the first step into an Al-Anon meeting. There, we all learn that what is said in the meeting stays in the meeting, including who is there.

Al-Anon members don't give advice, but they do share how they use the Al-Anon program to overcome the sense of loss that they felt prior to coming. Members understand how we feel because we have felt similar emotions no matter how great or seemingly small. The meetings focus on us and how to improve our lives, regardless of whether the alcoholic(s) continue(s) to drink or not. We often don't even talk about the alcoholic because we already know what living with alcoholism is like. We discuss solutions for us, we offer hope.

So if someone close to you drinks too much, why not try an Al-Anon meeting in a neighborhood or community near you? There are no dues or fees. You don't need an appointment or even need to speak when you come. We have a chair waiting for you. Why not try a few meetings and see if it helps? It worked for me, and I know it could work for you.

Gratefully,



Ric B., Executive Director
Al-Anon Family Group
Headquarters, Inc.



How do I know if Al-Anon could help me?

Heavy drinkers commonly say that their drinking is not as serious a problem as some people think. People who are close to them also have a tendency to minimize how seriously the drinker's alcohol abuse has affected them. They are trying to keep things as normal as possible under conditions that are sometimes unbearable.

These questions can help you decide if you could benefit from visiting a few Al-Anon meetings.

1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Do you have money problems because of someone else's drinking?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you feel that if the drinker cared about you, he or she would stop drinking to please you?
5. Are plans frequently upset or canceled because of the drinker?
6. Do you make threats, such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
7. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?
8. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
9. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
10. Have you refused social invitations out of fear or anxiety?
11. Do you feel like a failure because you can't control someone else's drinking?
12. Do you think that if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be solved?

If you answered **"yes"** to one or more of these questions, Al-Anon or Alateen may be helpful.



When someone close to you drinks too much...

Sometimes the problem drinker is a spouse or partner. Sometimes parents are concerned about their son or daughter's drinking. Sometimes the drinker is—or was—a parent, another relative, a co-worker, or a friend.

Al-Anon and Alateen—where you can find help

Al-Anon is a mutual support program for people who are living with—or have lived with—someone whose drinking created problems for themselves or others.

Alateen meetings are held in many locations for young people, usually teenagers, whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. While Alateen members run their own meetings, adult Group Sponsors are there for safety and to provide guidance. To ensure the safety of Alateen meetings, Group Sponsors must be in compliance with Alateen Safety and Behavioral Requirements.

Someone close to me has a drug problem

Al-Anon Family Groups have one focus: to help friends and families of alcoholics. The *2015 Al-Anon Membership Survey* reported, however, that 40 percent of Al-Anon members *first* came to Al-Anon Family Groups because of a friend or relative who had a drug problem. The survey also showed that 85 percent of these members eventually came to realize that someone's drinking had also negatively affected their lives.



How serious does the drinker's problem have to be for Al-Anon to help?

From the Al-Anon perspective, it doesn't matter whether the drinker is an alcoholic or not. What really matters is: does the drinking trouble *you*?

Lasting effects...

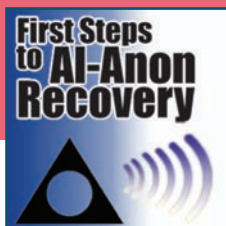
Even if there isn't active alcoholism in your life now, sometimes a relationship with a problem drinker can have long-lasting effects.

Al-Anon and Aalateen offer an opportunity for healing and personal growth. Members help each other to understand and unravel the lingering effects that resulted from someone else's drinking—whether the drinking is still active or not.

Explaining the disease to a young child

"We may not want to think that our children know what is going on, but they often *do* know something is terribly wrong. Children have an amazing capacity for dealing with the truth. Shrouding the illness in mystery and lies is far more frightening than a down-to-earth talk about the disease of alcoholism.

In explaining the disease to young children, it is helpful to compare it to a chronic illness that they know. We can point out that the alcoholic is sick and doesn't mean all the things said while drinking. We should be careful to explain to our children that they are in no way responsible for the drinking and remind them that they are loved." From *How Can I Help My Children?* (P-9)



You can listen to what some professionals say about family recovery and the benefits of Al-Anon Family Groups on Al-Anon's Web site, al-anon.org. Click on the icon for the *First Steps to Al-Anon Recovery* audio podcast series. Here's what one member of Al-Anon had to say about the podcast titled, "Connections between families, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and Al-Anon Family Groups."

"I'm glad I trusted my instincts to go to Al-Anon."

"As I listened to this interview, I thought about how great it would have been if the professionals I sought help from had referred me to Al-Anon. The doctor could only recommend antidepressants. A marriage counselor told me the term 'alcoholic' had bad connotations and that I needed to accept my husband's decision to continue drinking. A psychiatrist told me that my husband had deviant behavior. My father referred to my husband as a 'sociopath.'

"I'm glad I trusted my instincts to go to Al-Anon. I could really relate to the loneliness described in this interview. I thought it would never pass.

"This interview explains very clearly how important it is for family members to recover and for the family dynamics to change—not just to help the alcoholic stay sober but for the family members' well-being.

"I liked hearing how family members are empowered by Al-Anon and can 'pass it (recovery) forward' to other members still struggling with a loved one's drinking or even when the alcoholic attains sobriety.

"I felt encouraged by this interview that more therapists and counselors are aware of the importance of family recovery and Al-Anon. I felt hope for future generations."



AL-ANON MEMBERS REPORT

*“improved
well-being”*



According to the *2015 Al-Anon Membership Survey*, 92 percent of Al-Anon members reported that their lives have been very positively affected by their membership in Al-Anon.

Complete results from the survey are available on the “For Professionals” page of Al-Anon’s Web site at **al-anon.org**.

What kind of
'*answers*'
will I find at
Al-Anon?



Al-Anon members find support and understanding as they share their experiences in applying the Al-Anon principles to their lives.

This peer-to-peer exchange helps them discover new choices and new ways of thinking about how to handle the effects of alcohol abuse. They do not give each other advice or specific direction.

Family members can find support in Al-Anon during and after therapy

*Michael Yeager, B.A., LCDC, CAS
Houston, Texas*

I recommend attending Al-Anon to my clients who are family members of alcoholics. Participation in Al-Anon supports the “work” the family members do while they are in therapy. Al-Anon also acts as an effective aftercare program.

Al-Anon offers these people the opportunity to end their self-imposed isolation, taken on by living in an addicted family environment. Al-Anon members support each other through many life-changing experiences. Discussions at meetings help members discover choices and in turn they can feel empowered to be free, flexible, and vibrant.

I clearly see my clients benefitting
from their participation
in Al-Anon by:

**Developing and enhancing their
inner strength and self-worth.**

Feeling their feelings.

**Rebuilding and taking
responsibility for their lives.**

Setting healthy boundaries.

Therapy offers a safe environment for family members to get to the bottom of their limiting behavioral and belief problems. It is available from time to time, when the going gets tough. Al-Anon, however, acts as a supportive fellowship for further growth and development for lifelong living.



I didn't cause it, I can't control it, and **I can't cure the alcoholic**

Karen D., Virginia

"...I believed my son's drinking was my fault."

I felt so apprehensive when I went to my first Al-Anon meeting. The last thing I wanted to do was go into a room full of strangers and tell them about my personal problems. Somehow I found the courage to walk into the room, even though every ounce of me wanted to run the other way.

One of the first things I heard was, "No situation is helpless..." I also heard that I didn't cause it, I can't control it, and I can't cure the alcoholic. Those were words I desperately needed to hear because I believed my son's drinking was my fault. I felt foolish when I cried, but no one judged me. In fact, everyone seemed to understand my pain, even though I hadn't said a word. I will never forget the Al-Anon member who approached me after the meeting and said, "You're safe here. This is the right place for you to be."

*"You're safe here.
This is the right place for you to be."*





It was in the rooms of Al-Anon that I learned that I was not alone, and that by sharing with others the pain and shame of my husband's alcoholism, I could begin to heal. I stopped trying to fix him and I started taking care of myself.

Manette M., California

I learned **I wasn't responsible** for my husband's drinking

Chris W., Alberta

"I was ashamed that my husband was an alcoholic and I felt responsible for his drinking."

I went to my first Al-Anon meeting with a great deal of fear and trepidation. Among my concerns were – "Who would I see there?" and "What if it's someone I knew?" When I was growing up, my dad was the town drunk and I was terribly ashamed of that. If someone from my home town attended the meeting, they would know that I had married an alcoholic. I was ashamed that my husband was an alcoholic and I felt responsible for his drinking.

What did not occur to me at the time was that everyone at the meeting would be there for exactly the same reason—their lives were affected by someone else's drinking. I was not aware of the protective cloak of anonymity in Al-Anon. We do not talk about who attends meetings. We do not divulge what is discussed. It was an enormous relief to me.

It was also an enormous relief to hear that I am not responsible for my husband's drinking. That first meeting made me want to hear more. Al-Anon became a lifeline for me.

"Al-Anon became a lifeline for me."

Alateen is supportive, safe, and consistent

*Gail Barker, LCPC
School Counselor
Idaho*

“I often hear how this is the one safe place they have in their lives...”

We had our Alateen group meeting today and I have to tell you how grateful I am for Alateen. It has made such an amazing difference in these students' lives. Many of them shared how they are now getting along better with their family—both the drinking and the non-drinking family members. I often hear how this is the one safe place they have in their lives—to be able to share whatever is on their minds, where others won't judge, pass it around, or get mad.

It is amazing to see the transformation in these students. I see them

going from a beaten down, angry, hopeless teenager—trying to cope with alcoholism in the family—to gradually feeling and finding peace, hope, and strength from others, loving each other and being happy. I so love it. It gives them assurance and hope that one counselor can't possibly convey to them. It is a group process and an inspired process, and to have this opportunity in the school is amazing, since most of these kids would not be able to get to an evening meeting in the community. Their home life in their alcoholic families is such



“It is amazing to see the transformation in these students.”

that they wouldn't be able to get transportation at night or feel free to do so.

Alateen is supportive for them—safe and consistent. Children in alcoholic families do not know consistency, but in Alateen they learn to trust. It affects their outlook, their self-esteem, their grades in school, their friend and family relationships, their confidence, their ability to show concern for others, patience, peace of mind—so many things they probably would not get anywhere else.

The students ask if Alateen will

be at their next school, if they are moving or when they go on to high school. It is a safety net for them. They count on it, and I am so grateful we have been able to get Alateen in so many other schools.

I so appreciate the Alateen Group Sponsors that are here faithfully each week. The Alateen members love them. I feel such overwhelming gratitude for the Alateen program. I know without a doubt the changes it has made in these children's lives—changes and tools that will stay with them and affect their whole lives.

I came into Al-Anon shaking, weeping, and totally exhausted from living with my alcoholic husband. It was obvious that I was a newcomer. A few kind members noticed I was in pain, and sat with me as I cried. I was told, “You are in the right place, it may not seem like it now but you’ll get better. Just keep coming back.”

I am now one of those Al-Anon members who sit with a newcomer. Al-Anon is worth the time it takes to step over the threshold for a meeting.

Janette H., California

I was encouraged to keep coming back

Sharon A., Alberta

“...I know I will be okay.”

I still remember the thick fog that my world had become by the time I found my way to my first Al-Anon meeting. I had tried everything I could think of to cope with my young son’s deteriorating mental health, plummeting school grades, and abuse of alcohol and drugs. None of my worrying, monitoring, or attempting to get help for him seemed to make any difference. Instead, I was sinking deeper into despair, confusion, guilt, growing self-doubt, and fear. How did we end up here?

At my first Al-Anon meeting, I didn’t absorb many of the words, but I knew I was with people who understood. I felt as if I was finally in a safe enough place to allow myself to grasp the loneliness, isolation, pain, and chaos that had taken over my home life. I shared a little bit with the group that day, and was so relieved to receive the welcoming warmth, support, and calm understanding of those group members. They encouraged me to just keep coming back, and that by simply coming back, I would find my own answers.

I did come back. As I returned more consistently, I realized a growing sense of hope, acceptance, gratitude, and faith in the idea that I have my own recovery to work on in order to be healthy for myself and for my family, as we face the challenges and effects of addiction. Al-Anon continues to help me grow! Now I have the tools and support I need to face whatever lies ahead, and I know I will be okay.

Was my wife's drinking 'really' alcoholism?

Rob A., Minnesota

I wasn't sure if Al-Anon was right for me. I didn't know if my wife's drinking pattern was really alcoholism. Turns out it didn't matter. Al-Anon taught me to be responsible for my own life and my own feelings, not hers.

The support I found as soon as I walked into a meeting was incredible. I heard so many stories of hope from people in situations like mine—or even worse.

"I heard so many stories of hope from people in situations like mine—or even worse."



I was worried I might be lectured, but the members put me at ease with "take what you like and leave the rest." I felt I could really trust members when they told me I was in the right place.

I decided I wanted to go to as many meetings as I could, to learn as much as possible about recovering from the effects of someone else's drinking. I was no longer suffering alone. I felt like I had walked into rooms full of old friends who really understood and cared about me.

I came to Al-Anon to find help for my alcoholic and because I knew I was broken. I keep coming back because of the warmth, the wealth of knowledge, and the hope I receive that I can pass on to others. Thanks to all who were here for me and to those yet to come.

Sandy T., Minnesota



I thought my family problems were unique

David, Rhode Island

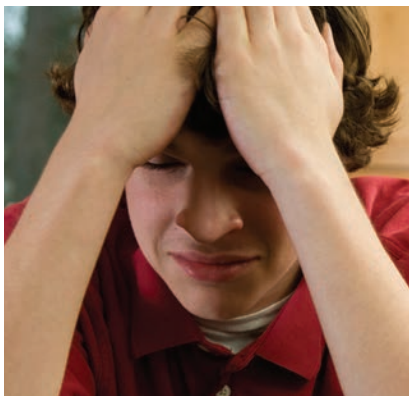
"I thought if I could only out-think my child, be three steps ahead, and increasingly monitor the behavior, I could make it change."

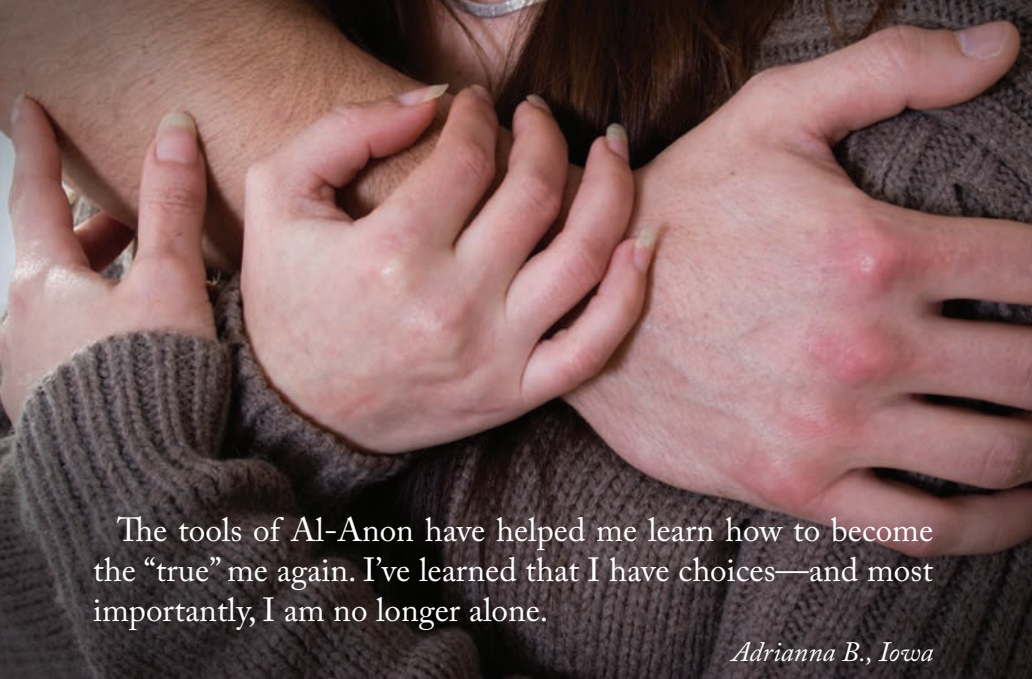
Before my first Al-Anon meeting, I thought my teenage child's drinking and drug use was unique. I tried to hide the problem from other parents and teachers. I isolated, kept my emotions to myself,

and resorted to verbal abuse. I was ashamed and fearful. My child's actions dominated the household. I thought if I could only outthink my child, be three steps ahead, and increasingly monitor the behavior, I could make it change.

None of my actions at home ultimately made any significant difference in my child's behavior. Being a martyr only hurt me. My "anticipatory anxiety" about every aspect of my family life only made me sick.

The "gift" of desperation caused me to attend my first Al-Anon meeting. My "secret" life was so strong, I even considered using a false first name during the opening at that first meeting. I learned I could share parts of myself in a confidential manner without judgment and without advice-giving, which I didn't want. I am human, thus not perfect, and I experience happy times and sad times the same as other people. I can't fix the world, but I can find myself.





The tools of Al-Anon have helped me learn how to become the “true” me again. I’ve learned that I have choices—and most importantly, I am no longer alone.

Adrianna B., Iowa

I walked in the room and heard people telling a familiar story

Christina F., Oregon

“I could sit and listen, and the relief I felt was incredible.”

The effects of growing up in an alcoholic family hit me hard. I knew I needed help, but I was ashamed to admit it. A friend asked me to go to an Al-Anon meeting with her, and I am so glad she did.

I walked in the room and heard people telling my story. For the first time in my life, I did not have to pretend to know anything. I could sit and listen, and the relief I felt was incredible. No one expected anything from me. I simply needed to show up.

What is the difference between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ meetings?

Anyone concerned about someone else’s drinking is welcome to attend any Al-Anon meeting, whether it is listed as “open” or “closed” in a local meeting schedule.

A “closed” meeting is “open” to anyone who is troubled by someone else’s drinking. An “open” meeting, however, also welcomes guests, students, and interested professionals who want to learn by observing an Al-Anon meeting.

Observers attending open Al-Anon meetings are requested to abide by the principles that guide participation in all Al-Anon Family Group meetings, especially the principles of confidentiality and anonymity that protect its members.

If the Al-Anon meeting is held at a church...

Al-Anon meetings include people of different religious affiliations, as well as individuals without any spiritual beliefs.

An Al-Anon meeting held in a church is not affiliated with that church. Al-Anon is a spiritual program, but it is not religious and is not affiliated with any church or religion, just as it is not affiliated with any other private or public organization. Many Al-Anon groups meet at libraries, hospitals, or other facilities.

Al-Anon groups focus *exclusively* on issues related to helping the friends and families of problem drinkers. The location of the meeting place is irrelevant to the content and discussion at the meeting.



How to find an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting

Call **1-888-4AL-ANON** (1-888-425-2666)

or visit **al-anon.org**
for meeting information.

Al-Anon may also be listed in your local telephone directory.

On-line meetings and telephone meetings sometimes supplement, rather than replace, face-to-face Al-Anon meetings. They are also helpful for the homebound and for those who live in rural areas, as well as for travelers who can participate in a meeting from anywhere in the world. To find a list of electronic meetings, visit al-anon.org, or send an e-mail to wso@al-anon.org.

No appointments are necessary

Anyone concerned about someone else's drinking is welcome to walk in and attend any meeting.

There are no dues or fees

Members make voluntary contributions because each group is self-supporting and declines outside contributions. Most groups pass a basket at each meeting to help cover routine costs, such as renting the meeting room, supporting Al-Anon services, and buying literature.

I have a relationship with my dad— thanks to Alateen

Jackie

“When I wasn’t acting as my dad’s caretaker, I behaved badly...”

My entire life, I was aware that my dad was an alcoholic, but it wasn’t until my freshman year of high school that I felt the full weight of it. My parents were divorced and I lived with my dad.

Living in that house was like walking on eggshells. I tried to be quiet and keep to myself so he wouldn’t notice me or get angry with me. I avoided having friends over.

When he passed out at night, I immediately went to his hiding places and poured the alcohol down the sink. When he left me alone in the car, I would look for the soda bottles filled with vodka. It didn’t occur to me that he was a grown man and would just buy more alcohol, and that all I was doing was pouring money down the drain.

When I wasn’t acting as my dad’s caretaker, I behaved badly—starting fights at home, drinking, and hanging out with the wrong people. I secretly hoped I’d catch his attention and open his eyes. I was desperate for some control in a seemingly hopeless situation.

My mom started to go to Al-Anon meetings to find help and comfort to cope with my dad’s drinking. She urged me to go to a group called Alateen for kids who struggle with alcoholic parents, but I firmly insisted I could handle things on my own.

I didn’t need any help, but playing the babysitter at home affected my schoolwork and my grades quickly suffered for it. The school counselor strongly suggested that I go to Alateen as well.

Soon after, I found the days harder to get through. I found myself breaking down more often. I finally went to my first meeting. Although the meeting felt strange and uncomfortable at first, I quickly found solace in that room, listening to people’s stories, and the way they dealt with the alcoholic in their lives. We all had the same story, just different details.

Knowing that others were going through the same thing as me took my mind off my own problems. For the time I was there, every Monday night, the things going on at home couldn’t touch me. I could breathe for a while.

I learned that the only person I could control was myself. Learning to accept that I couldn’t control my dad’s illness was something that lifted an incredible weight off my shoulders.



Two years and two relapses later, I began to lose hope that the man who had raised me was coming back. Someone had once told me that alcoholics carry their disease as if it were a rabid dog chained to them, following them everywhere they go.

I had spent so much time focusing on how the disease had affected my family that I had never once stopped to think that my dad didn't want to carry the burden either. It sounds like an obvious thing to say, but when living with an alcoholic, it's easy to view their actions as selfish desires rather than compulsions with which they struggle.

When I stopped looking at my dad as a disappointment or an enemy, I saw someone who was broken and needed help. I began to feel sympathy for him. He didn't do these things on purpose, and perhaps he felt just as lost as I did.

It sounds crazy to say that I'm grateful for my dad's illness, but without it, I know there's no way I'd be where I am today. I wouldn't have the relationship I have with my dad today and be able to call him one of my best friends. I wouldn't have found the support and friends that I found through Alateen. I wouldn't have learned the lessons that I did or become the person that I am now.





Recovery for family members helps the drinker's recovery

*An interview with Cynthia Moreno-Tuohy, BSW, NCACII, SAP,
Executive Director, NAADAC, The Association for
Addiction Professionals, Alexandria, VA*

This interview is adapted from an Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.'s
First Steps to Al-Anon Recovery audio podcast series.

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Q Why is it important for the alcoholic's family members to receive help?

A The family needs to get healthier whether or not the alcoholic is receiving treatment or maintaining sobriety. But, when family members receive help and information, they are able to provide a support system and help build a safety net at home for themselves and for their children. Every family member needs to feel they have support.

Part of our protocols as addiction professionals is to look at what's happening with the family. We don't want to forget the family. The family needs to participate in a family information night or a family treatment program, if available from the treatment center. Al-Anon is talked about there as well.

If the alcoholic is or has been in treatment, the family needs to understand that treatment arrests the addiction but does not cure it. Recovery is an ongoing, daily process for alcoholics and their family members.

Q Newcomers to Al-Anon frequently want to know what the cause of alcoholism is. They want to pinpoint how, when, where, and why their loved one acquired a drinking problem.

A Today, we know the disorder of alcohol or drug addiction is genetic and that we're going to have intergenerational addictions within families. We also know that alcoholism has roots in environmental causes such as the inappropriate behaviors, poor parenting, and communication skills within a family over one or multiple generations. So, an alcohol use disorder can be both a combination of nature (genetics) and nurture (environmental, psychological, social, or cultural).

It is possible for both the drinker and the family to recover from the trauma and negative patterns they have experienced. As a result, change begins within the family system and that's what we want to see. We want individuals and families to get healthier.



Q Do you recommend that counselors and therapists refer family members to Al-Anon?

A Absolutely. The first step for the family is to understand that they do not have power over the drinker's alcoholism. They need to learn what issues and actions they can and cannot touch.



Q How do family members benefit from attending Al-Anon?

A When the family or anyone close to the drinker goes to Al-Anon, they first need to focus on themselves. Then, they can begin to learn some of the skills and better ways of approaching the alcoholic family member. The family becomes healthier and they get the support they need from attending Al-Anon.



What 'anonymity' is all about

There is a spiritual aspect to anonymity.

Everyone is equally humble in facing the sometimes overwhelming challenges of dealing with the problems of a loved one's struggle with alcohol.

Anonymity helps keep the emphasis on principles that can help solve personal problems, rather than on the personal situations that are part of the problem. No one's social status, professional standing, or level of education matters at an Al-Anon meeting.

Confidentiality ensures that you can speak from the heart at an Al-Anon meeting, because everything said at the meeting *stays* at the meeting.

You don't have to worry that someone from the Al-Anon meeting will approach you in a public place and start discussing your personal, confidential problems.

Statement of Purpose

Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism was the title of Al-Anon's second book, published in 1965. This magazine (like that book) includes articles by Al-Anon members and treatment professionals who share their personal perspective on how Al-Anon Family Groups can help people troubled by someone else's drinking.

Al-Anon cooperates with therapists, counselors, and other professionals, but does not affiliate with any organization or professional. Articles written by Al-Anon members do not speak for Al-Anon as a whole, but reflect only their own personal experience with Al-Anon Family Groups.

Stories in this magazine present the personal experience of actual Al-Anon and Alateen members. In keeping with Al-Anon's tradition of anonymity, members do not use their full names. No one whose picture appears in this publication is a member of Al-Anon or Alateen.

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1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454;
(757) 563-1600; fax (757) 563-1656; wso@al-anon.org.

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters (Canada) Inc.
275 Slater Street, Suite 900, Ottawa, ON K1P 5H9
(613) 723-8484; wso@al-anon.org

What can you do,
when someone close to you
drinks too much?

You might be surprised
at what you can learn
at an Al-Anon meeting.

For meeting information call

1-888-4AL-ANON

(1-888-425-2666)

or visit

al-anon.org

Al-Anon may also be listed
in your local telephone directory.



Al-Anon **Family** Groups

Strength and hope for friends and families of problem drinkers