

Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism 2011

*Are you **troubled** by someone's **drinking**?
Al-Anon Family Groups can help.*



Dear Reader,

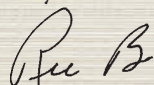
Growing up in an alcoholic family, I learned that it was important to keep the family's secrets—even though each of us would tell anyone who would listen about the problems caused by my father's drinking. Each time I told the story, I hoped for your sympathy—or at least your understanding—that I wasn't responsible for the way I behaved.

Before I went to my first Al-Anon meeting, I just didn't see how talking about my problems with a group of strangers could help me when talking to so many of my friends always made me feel worse. I thought that if I went to a meeting, it would mean that I would have to admit what an absolute failure I was. I finally went to my first meeting because I had run out of excuses as to why Al-Anon Family Groups couldn't help me.

The members welcomed me, gave me an Al-Anon book to read, and invited me to listen if I wasn't ready to talk. I don't remember a lot, but I do remember that there was hope in that room; even people with problems worse than mine weren't feeling sorry for themselves.

I am extremely grateful that those members were there the night I first went and that they continued to come week after week, even though I wasn't willing to commit that I would be there. After the meetings ended, they always said to me, "See you next week." At first, I came back thinking they were expecting me. Now I go to the meeting each week waiting for the newcomer who doesn't want to be there, but—like the old me—has run out of reasons why Al-Anon Family Groups can't help.

Al-Anon Family Groups—we're there for ourselves and we're willing to be there for you. Try a meeting. We offer hope ... and we understand what the effects of someone else's drinking can have on you and your loved ones. See you at a meeting soon,



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



Statement of Purpose

Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism was the title of Al-Anon's second book, first published in 1965. This magazine (like that book) includes articles by 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 the professional community, but does not affiliate with any individual professional or professional organization and has no opinion, pro or con, on any issues outside the practice of the Al-Anon program.

Similarly, all articles written by Al-Anon members reflect only their own personal experience with the Al-Anon program.

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Sometimes when the drinker is gone, the effects of the drinking remain—until they are understood.

Thank you to Al-Anon's professional friends who refer patients and clients to Al-Anon Family Groups. Forty-four percent of adult Al-Anon members reported that a referral from a professional was the most important factor in influencing them to attend Al-Anon, according to our 2009 Al-Anon Membership Survey.*

*Survey findings are available at www.al-anon.alateen.org

Stories in this magazine present the personal experiences of actual Al-Anon and Alateen members. In keeping with Al-Anon's tradition of anonymity, this magazine credits members without using last names. No one whose full-face image appears in this publication is a member of Al-Anon or Alateen.

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How drinking affects family members



What are the Al-Anon Family Groups?

Al-Anon is a mutual support program for anyone who is troubled by a relative or friend's drinking.

Alateen is our program for younger members. The Alateen members chair their own meetings. Alateen Group Sponsors are Al-Anon members who have been certified as having met the safety requirements set by their Area to attend Alateen meetings and, if necessary, provide guidance.

How do I find an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting?

Call:
1-888-4ALANON
(1-888-425-2666)
Monday – Friday,
8 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET

Visit:
www.al-anon.alateen.org
for meeting information.

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

How can I recognize the effects of someone else's drinking in my life?

We can easily recognize how alcohol affects the drinker. It's not as easy for family and friends to recognize how the drinker's behavior has affected them.

These questions can help you identify the effects of someone else's drinking. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, Al-Anon Family Groups may be able to help. For more questions, please visit our Web site at www.al-anon.alateen.org.

Do you worry
about how much someone else drinks?

Do you have money problems
because of someone else's drinking?

Do you tell lies
to cover up for someone else's drinking?

Do you feel that if the drinker cared about you,
he or she would stop drinking to please you?

Are plans frequently upset or canceled
because of the drinker?

Do you make threats,
such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?

Are you afraid to upset someone
for fear it will set off a drinking bout?

Have you been hurt or embarrassed
by a drinker's behavior?

Do you search for hidden alcohol?

Have you refused social invitations
out of fear or anxiety?

Do you think that if the drinker stopped drinking,
your other problems would be solved?

Do you feel like a failure
because you can't control the drinking?

How I realized that I had a problem

By Barbara M., Ontario

I knew I needed help when I slammed the kitchen door so hard that I broke the glass. I had just had a fight with my husband and I was furious.

I was in near hysterics. I called a friend; she calmly asked if I would be interested in going to an Al-Anon meeting. I told her that my husband was a heavy drinker, but certainly not an alcoholic.

I believed that alcoholics were only unshaven men who sat on the street corners begging for money. I was in denial about my husband being an alcoholic.

Within a week I attended my first Al-Anon meeting. I was nervous. I didn't want to admit there was alcoholism in my home or that I was unable to cope with life. I found wonderful, nurturing people in Al-Anon who understood and offered unconditional love and acceptance.

My wife's drinking led me to Al-Anon meetings

By Jason B.

I came to Al-Anon hoping to find a way to deal with the anguish of my wife's drinking. The chaos, destruction, and loneliness were overwhelming. As the dedicated husband, I was trying to fix things and make everything okay again, but I was unable to accomplish that.

I learned that I could not control her drinking, but that there was plenty that I could do to help myself.



Trying to take care of my son consumed my life

By Ruth G., Texas

I was a wreck when I walked into my first Al-Anon meeting. My son had been arrested and put in jail. All I wanted was to help him. I didn't realize how much I needed help.

Mothers are prone to living their lives for their children. Little by little, I began to realize that I needed to take care of myself. It was amazing how quickly peace began to replace fear and worry.



Like the alcoholic, family members are unaware of how the drinking affects them

By Rev. Daniel Gowan, M.Div, M.A., LCDC, LPC

My counseling practice is hosted by a faith-based organization. We usually discuss the morality of alcoholism amid the struggle of family members who are trying to “make the alcoholic quit” or at least modify the other person's behavior. I encourage family members to consider that the alcoholic is a sick person trying to get well, rather than a bad person trying to get good.

Many clients trying to cope with the disease of alcoholism are unfamiliar with the concept of a family disease. But when we discuss it, they begin to recognize its pervasiveness.

I am convinced that the number one feature of this disease is denial. This is true for both the alcoholic and the family member. I point out that to resist treating their role in the system is no different than the alcoholic refusing to quit drinking.

Al-Anon helps clients understand this principle of participation in the system. Attending Al-Anon meetings helps clients to engage in a healthy way with this disease.

My rule for members living in an alcoholic situation is: don't put more effort into the alcoholic's recovery than the alcoholic does. But con-

versely, everyone must be willing to work on their own stuff. Members of the family must show willingness to address their issues no less than the alcoholic.

Al-Anon is a useful resource for family members and friends to discover how they participate in this system or family disease. As a family disease, alcoholism must be treated within the entire family. The drinking is only a symptom of the problem. Otherwise, abstinence would eliminate all problems, which is not usually the case.

Rev. Gowan is the Director of Benchmark Counseling in Plano, Texas.



Why the drinker's family members need Al-Anon



Are there dues or fees for membership?

No. 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 its routine costs, such as renting the meeting room, supporting Al-Anon services, and buying literature.

Do you want to learn more about Al-Anon before you go to your first meeting?

One resource is the free "First Steps to Al-Anon Recovery," audio podcast series available on our Web site, **www.al-anon.alateen.org**.



Learning to see my husband's drinking in a new light

By Carol, Australia

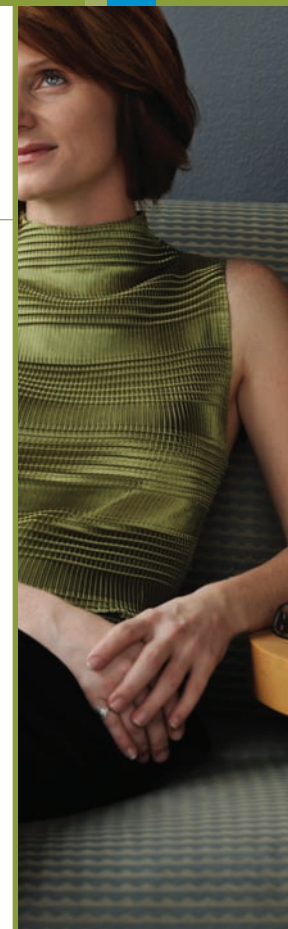
The first time I ever heard of alcohol being a problem was when my mother warned me about going out with someone who drank. I was an obedient child—until I met the man I would marry; then all obedience went out the window.

I thought it was his mother's fault that he drank... so when he was with me, it would be all right and we would live happily ever after. I soon learned differently!

It wasn't until I came into Al-Anon that I learned anything about alcoholism. I learned to face alcoholism and look through the illness to the person underneath.

My husband has an illness. What a relief it was to realize that I didn't cause it, I can't control it, and I can't cure it.

I've learned to laugh about situations that I would have cried about in the past. I have allowed myself to love my husband, warts and all.



Learning about myself helped me to cope with my son's drinking

By Laurie L., Indiana

I would often ask myself: what can I do to fix my 23 year old alcoholic son? Little did I know that I needed help—not for alcohol, but for the addiction of trying too hard to make everything perfect for other people. I realized that it is not within my power to change anyone except myself. If I were to work on myself and be healthy emotionally, perhaps there would be a natural ripple effect, without my having to fix anyone.

Coping with alcoholism distorts what's "normal"

Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism 2011 interviewed Debra Jay, a writer, lecturer, and addictions therapist who works as a family program facilitator and interventionist in Grosse Pointe, MI.

Why is the recovery process important for the drinker's family?

The longer a family is subjected to another person's alcoholism, the further they diverge from the world of the well-adjusted. Addiction creates unmanageability—and families respond by trying to bring things back to "normal."

The trouble is that the disease of addiction always knocks everyone off center again. As a result, two things begin to happen: families try harder to create balance, and they grow more accustomed to being off balance.

Trapped in this alcoholic system, everyone scrambles to find safety. Each calamity is met with a corresponding survival skill. The alcoholic family must twist and bend their behaviors, emotions, thoughts, and spirits in an attempt to compensate for the negative consequences caused by the alcoholism.

Over time, survival skills are hardened into resentments, perfectionism, caretaking, and controlling behavior. These character traits of alcoholic families spill into every area of their lives, negatively affecting the people around them and, without *family* recovery, they are passed on from generation to generation.

The alcoholic may be sober or isolated from the family, but these traits are integrated into family personalities and remain part of day-to-day living. For this reason, people close to alcoholics benefit from their own recovery program in Al-Anon to help overcome the ways alcoholism has changed them.



What are the benefits that family members gain from attending Al-Anon?

Al-Anon transforms negative spirituality—isolation, fear, perfectionism, anger, resentment, controlling behavior—into positive spirituality. After all, it's the spirit of the family that determines the quality of family life. Going to Al-Anon meetings is a small step that leads to unexpected and powerful changes.

When spirits change, families change. We realize we are given only one life to live, and it is precious. We have a responsibility to keep addiction from stealing away with the best of *our* lives. Addiction distorts and twists spirits, but Al-Anon gives the gift of recovery.

Why are family members resistant to seeking help for themselves?

A detrimental myth persists: *that the problem is solved when the alcoholic gets sober*. Families have a false sense of being in command of their lives because they are cleaning up the messes, taking over responsibilities, and pointing out the alcoholic's sources of trouble.

Over time, family members focus so intently on the alcoholic's problems, that they no longer see themselves and their own needs clearly. They can't see how alcoholism is changing them.

For the family, the notion that someone else is at fault – the alcoholic – leads them to erroneously believe they need only wait for him or her to stop drinking—and then everything will return to normal. However, this belief does not spare families from encountering reality sooner or later. Alcoholic symptoms

can persist long after an alcoholic becomes abstinent, because quitting drinking is simply the prerequisite for recovery.

Most everyone is familiar with the term "dry drunk." A similar term is needed for families who continue to operate using old survival skills long after the alcoholic is in recovery.

When families say, "We wish he would just stop drinking," what they are really hoping for is to reclaim a healthy, loving relationship with the alcoholic. However, if abstinence comes without recovery—for both the alcoholic and the family—relationship problems don't disappear. They frequently get worse. When families understand that Al-Anon helps them develop interpersonal skills that promote loving, healthy relationships, they more often find working the Twelve Steps relevant.

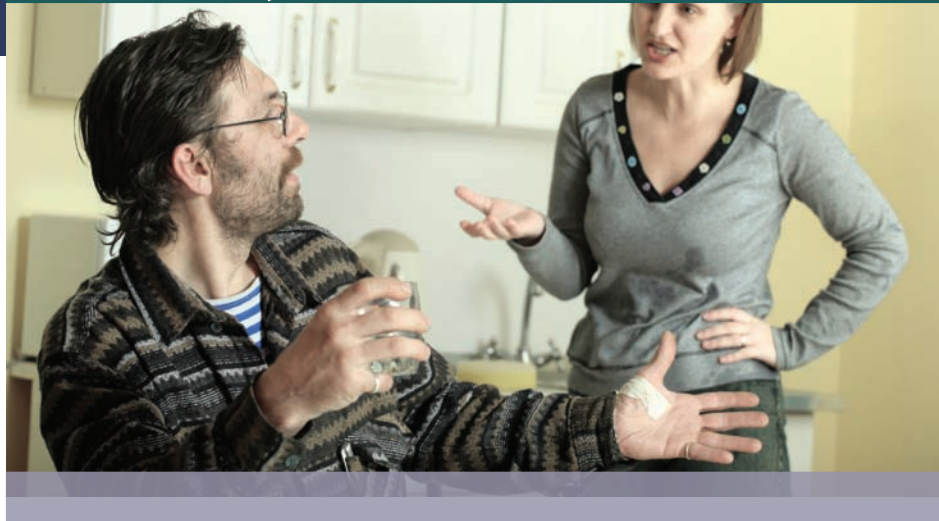
Al-Anon helped with family relationships

By Gayle W., Ontario

I married a personable, charming man. I soon realized I had a problem with his drinking. I was irritable and unreasonable on my good days; other days I was miserable and cranky. A family counselor suggested I go to Al-Anon Family Groups.

Today I am no longer ashamed of who I am—about my growing up in an emotionally and physically abusive alcoholic home. Now I am able to love others even when they are incapable of loving themselves, including some family members who continue their old behaviors.

Alcoholism is a family illness



What if I'm not sure the drinker has a serious problem?

Does the drinking bother you? We suggest attending at least six Al-Anon meetings before making a decision whether or not Al-Anon can be helpful to you.

What if I'm affected by someone else's drug problem?

According to Al-Anon's 2009 Membership Survey, one in three members first came to Al-Anon Family Groups because of a person with a drug problem. After going to meetings for awhile, nearly nine in ten of them later realized how someone's drinking had also affected their lives.

Is an appointment necessary to attend an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting?

No advance notice is necessary. Anyone concerned about someone else's drinking is welcome to attend.

Drinking affects family members who also need a healing process

By Michel Perron

The harms of alcohol and drug abuse are not limited to the user alone. One-third of adults report that they have experienced harm in the past year as a result of someone else's drinking (Canadian Addiction Survey 2006). One in ten reports family and marriage problems as a consequence of drinking. Clearly, substance abuse is an issue that affects not only the user, but the family as well.

The involvement of family members in the healing process has long been recognized as a factor in the success of treatment. Canada's National Treatment Strategy acknowledges the role of family members in an integrated systems approach to planning and delivering services and supports for substance abuse problems. General social support of

family as well as substance-specific support has been demonstrated to provide valuable contributions to initial and longer-term treatment outcomes. The involvement of family in the treatment and support of adolescent substance users has been shown to be particularly beneficial.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) acknowledges and appreciates the long standing and valuable contribution Al-Anon Family Groups provides to families across Canada, the U.S., and globally. It is through their types of services that those most affected by their loved ones' substance abuse can benefit from help, guidance, and support.

Michel Perron is the Chief Executive Officer for the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse in Ottawa, Ontario.





Al-Anon gave me a different perspective

By Jerry F., Hawaii

At first I didn't know anything about alcoholism—and didn't even know how little I knew. I was very confused. We didn't speak of alcoholism in my family. To suggest a family member was an alcoholic would have resulted in punishment. In Al-Anon, I began to understand that alcoholism is an illness, not a moral issue. My alcoholic spouse was a sick person, not a bad person.

Al-Anon members understand my struggles

By Daisy P., California

I find comfort in knowing I am not alone. Al-Anon opened the door to healing by listening to others who felt just like me. I finally feel like a normal person instead of being ashamed of even telling others where I grew up for fear they would know that my dad was a violent alcoholic and my mom was a battered woman until the day she died. I didn't want anyone to know of the mental, emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuses I suffered at the hands of my own family.

I'm grateful for the courageous in Al-Anon who shared so openly and honestly about their own struggles.

Teen copes with pressures of alcoholic mom

By Jessica R., Kansas

Growing up with a recovering alcoholic, I knew the names of our symptoms before I truly understood how they affected me personally. I didn't think that recovery was about *me*. Mom had the disease and I knew that I should be supportive of her.

I had a lot of problems in school and was getting desperate. Something was wrong with me and if I didn't fix it soon, I was going to explode. Pressure to be perfect and normal—and to fit in—almost sent me over the edge.

Eventually, even getting into fights wasn't enough. I had no words to describe the black hole loneliness left in my chest. I was a vacuum, and desperation was breaking me down.

After hitting a bottom point, I began to cry, care, and share in Alateen meetings. I eventually allowed the program to work—by working the program. Alateen saved me from myself and for that I am eternally grateful!

The Al-Anon meeting is a safe, supportive environment



Will Al-Anon or Alateen members tell other people that I was at a meeting?

Your privacy is protected by Al-Anon's principle of anonymity. Members do not disclose who attends our meetings to anyone else—even other members. This helps to create a safe and trustworthy meeting environment.

Everything said at an Al-Anon meeting is confidential. There is also an understanding among members that conversations among members outside of Al-Anon meetings are not disclosed to others.

Confidentiality is practiced at an Al-Anon meeting, however it has no legal basis. Anonymity in Al-Anon should not be confused with a legal right to privacy. Anyone who openly confesses a crime at an Al-Anon meeting, for example, should not expect any legal privilege or protection. But the principle of anonymity assures members that they are able to speak at an Al-Anon meeting without fear or embarrassment about the emotional and spiritual issues that they face in coping with the effects of someone else's drinking.

Why talking with strangers at Al-Anon meetings helps me

By Bob C., Missouri

A simple, normal question—such as, “How was your weekend?”—can be a problem. I don’t want to lie, but I’m ashamed to tell a family member that I spent the evening cleaning up broken glass after staying up until 3 a.m. listening to temper tantrums and abusive language.

That’s my secret from the outside world, but it’s also something I have in common with other Al-Anon members. It feels good to talk about

it freely with other people who understand.

My brother asked me why I share personal feelings with strangers at Al-Anon that I don’t share with my own family?

The answer is simple: Al-Anon is a safe place. No one will be critical of me there. No one will tell me what I should do or what I should have done. No one will judge me.

Family members can be quick to give advice, even when they don’t really understand what I’ve been going through. In Al-Anon, it’s the other way around: people there understand what I’m going through, but they don’t give advice or tell me what to do. That’s a good combination—understanding and support, without advice or direction.

“Even though I was too afraid to talk when I went to my first meeting, I listened as other members shared and I knew I was in the right place.”
—Judi S., Minnesota

Strangers at my first Al-Anon meeting helped me to let go of pain

By Barbara H., New Jersey

I felt demoralized and resentful that I had to go to a room full of strangers to get the loving support I felt should come from my family.

I felt grateful to get the support I desperately needed, but was not used to someone telling me to take care of myself.

I didn’t set out to be a shrew. That’s just how I ended up after wearing myself out trying to help everybody in my

family, whether they wanted my help or not! I was running on empty. I didn’t have the energy or the skills to cope with having my will thwarted when I was “only trying to help.”



I found comfort within the ‘safety zone’ of an Al-Anon meeting

By Jesse K., Arizona

At Al-Anon meetings, I heard people share true feelings about what really happened in their lives. I was shocked at the honesty and openness I heard.

After many meetings of just listening, I gained the courage to talk a little. I understood that Al-Anon was indeed a safe place to share honestly about what I really saw and what I really felt. This honesty started me on my path of recovery.

An opportunity for acceptance and healing

By Jane Worth

Experience has shown that most alcoholics use denial as a means of refusing to accept the seriousness of their illness. Many are also in denial about how their alcoholism has affected their family.

Realizing that alcoholism is a family disease is a very important

step for the family, as well as the alcoholic.

There is a common bond among those whose lives have been affected by someone else’s drinking. Al-Anon offers a secure feeling of confidentiality. It provides the opportunity to ask questions and receive insight into what family members may be feeling.

Jane Worth is an administrator at the Comox Valley Recovery Centre in Courtenay, British Columbia, a small, non-profit residential recovery program.

The Al-Anon program offers 'tools' that help people manage their lives better



What happens at an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting?

Al-Anon members take turns sharing their experiences in applying the Al-Anon principles to their lives. They do not give each other advice. This peer-to-peer exchange of experiences helps them discover choices or new ideas to apply to their lives.

Are there electronic Al-Anon meetings?

Yes. Meetings on-line and by telephone supplement, rather than replace, face-to-face Al-Anon meetings.

To request a list of electronic meetings, visit www.al-anon.alateen.org, or send an e-mail to wso@al-anon.org.

A valuable coping tool—that I discovered at my first meeting

By Linda D., Wisconsin

When I went to my first Al-Anon meeting, my mission was to find out how I could get my husband to stop drinking. I was confused and very conflicted about what to do. "Can you tell me how to get him to stop? Should I leave him or should I stay?"

One member shared an Al-Anon saying about alcoholism: "I didn't cause it, I can't control it, and I can't cure it." I needed to hear these words.

I thought I had caused my husband's alcohol abuse because at times he told me that I was the reason he drank. I thought he would stop if I could become a better wife, mother, or housekeeper.

I had tried to control his drinking by hiding bottles, pouring them out, or by trying to keep him away from places where he might drink.

"I thought I had caused my husband's alcohol abuse because at times he told me that I was the reason he drank."

I can't cure it. I realized the mission that had brought me to this meeting wasn't really my mission at all. It wasn't my job to get him to stop drinking. I felt such relief from the burden I had placed upon myself.

I got the support and understanding I needed by coming to Al-Anon.



Disentangling myself from problems created by alcoholism

By Jim M., Oregon

I have learned that alcoholism is a disease, not a disgrace. I am responsible for my feelings and actions only, not for the drinker's.

I become stronger when I keep my focus on what I can control, and let go of things that I cannot control—such as someone else's drinking.

I found comfort and relief from my stress

By Mary Beth C., Maryland

At my first Al-Anon meeting I saw others enjoying the peacefulness I desired. Their strength and hope was so attractive that I found myself trusting it before I realized that I was doing so.

I needed what they talked about, even though I didn't know how to put it into words. The more I listened, the more I learned. It was like discovering a new language that I hadn't known existed.

They talked openly about fears, insecurities, trying things, failing at things, and discovering solu-



tions. For the first time in my life I'm relieved of the pressure to have everything under control. I don't have to have all the answers.

Al-Anon gave me insight into my troubled relationships

By David C., Ohio

As a Native American, I saw many of my relatives succumb to the disease of alcohol addiction. Early death was a common outcome. Only a fortunate few found sobriety in A.A. and lived to enjoy happy and prosperous lives.

Although I had my own episodes with alcohol, it wasn't until I discovered the fel-

lowship of Al-Anon that I began to gain insight into my problems. Understanding alcoholism as a family illness helped me understand my need to over-control my environment, my inability to understand healthy boundaries, and the deep-seated insecurities that haunted every corner of my existence.

Several marriages to daughters of active alcoholics created the pain that led me to Al-Anon, where I learned that it was fear that motivated my desire to over-control people, places, and things. This fear, coupled with anger issues related to childhood abuse, led to a merry-go-round of unhealthy relationships.

Single mother finds strength to cope with challenge of son's drinking

By Peggy J., Arkansas

I came to Al-Anon desperate for help in dealing with my son's alcoholism. I thought I was responsible for his illness and couldn't understand why my efforts to cure him always ended in failure. I was a divorced mother, totally on my own financially. I couldn't afford to lose my own health and sanity. What a blessing it was to learn that it wasn't my fault, that I hadn't caused it, couldn't control, or cure it. I began learning how necessary it was to take care of myself.

I learned to respond, rather than just to react

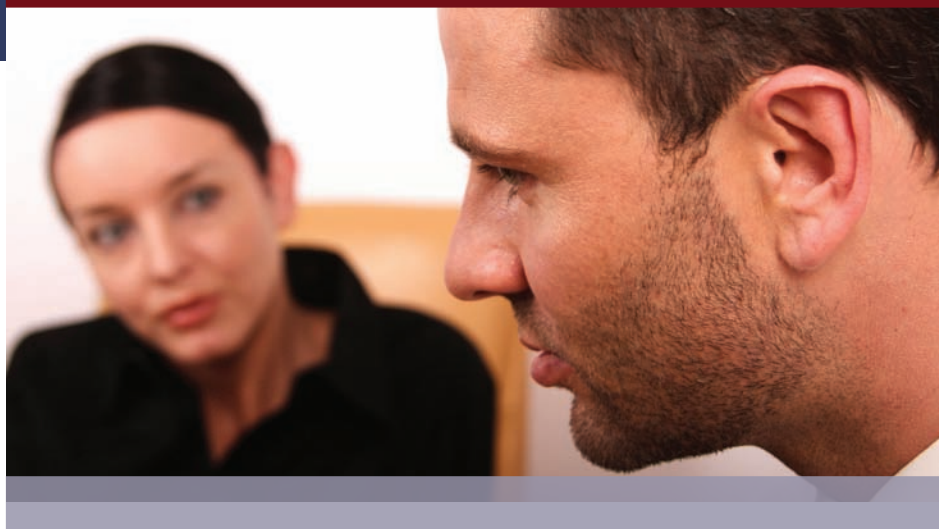
By Connie S., Iowa

I have learned that how I react to my alcoholic son is my choice. That used to be a foreign concept to me. I've always been very reactive to crisis.

In Al-Anon, I became aware that I am in charge of my emotions. No matter what decisions my son makes, I do not have to let myself become physically and emotionally defeated. I can love him—and for the first time, I am hopeful that I can find peace.



Therapy and Al-Anon complement each other



Al-Anon members report improved well-being

Al-Anon members find that the program has helped them in many ways, with about 95 percent saying that the program affected their lives very positively, according to the 2009 Membership Survey.

Members reported that their mental health and physical health have improved since attending Al-Anon Family Group meetings.

More information from the Membership Survey is available on Al-Anon's Web site at www.al-anon.alateen.org.

Psychiatrist advises patients to attend Al-Anon

By Mark A. Ritchie, M.D

Al-Anon Family Groups is a Twelve Step program—not to stop the alcoholic's drinking—but to help the person bothered by the drinking.

I tell my patients that Al-Anon might help them find the peace that they may be lacking, the loving detachment they cannot maintain, and the healthy compassion they seek for their alcoholic.

When patients go to their first meeting, they find some relief more often than not. They report that they have found others who have shared their pain and have found a new means of coping. If they continue to go to meetings, they start to take better care of themselves.

They learn to look at the roots of their codependent behavior and begin to make sense of how that behavior has been manifest in their lives. They begin to learn skills such that they are able to detach with love from the alcoholic, treat them with compassion, and therefore not make the situation worse by their own behavior. In essence they become healthier, happier, more spiritually-fulfilled human beings, with a greater sense of connection to other healthier, happier, spiritually-fulfilled people.

Mark A. Ritchie, M.D., is a psychiatrist in private practice at Solutions Psychiatric Associates, Los Gatos, CA.



I didn't know how else to deal with my anger and despair

By Rosie A., Massachusetts

My husband of 23 years was in a rehab hospital for his fifth try at detoxing from alcohol. I had a meeting with my husband's counselor. I was very angry that yet again I had to become involved with his treatment. I resented having to talk to her and felt there was nothing to say.

The counselor asked me if I had ever considered going to Al-Anon. Thinking that my life could not get any worse, I decided to find a way to get help for myself.

Since joining Al-Anon, I am learning about myself. I have grown more aware of how I can change my role in our relationship.

Understanding and support for families with alcoholic teens

By Cheryl L., Ohio

My son was referred to an outpatient treatment program following a court intervention. At the end of his treatment, one of the therapists recommended Al-Anon for the family. When I went to Al-Anon, my motive was to fix my family.

Some of the things about Al-Anon seemed hokey to me, like the use of slogans, such as: "Let Go and Let God" or "Progress Not Perfection." They didn't mean much to me at the time. But what did help—and what kept me in the program of Al-Anon—was a loving group of friends who understood what I felt and what I was going through.

I didn't feel comfortable telling my coworkers or friends, or even family what I was going through with my son. Al-Anon gave me a place of warmth, caring, and support. It gave me a place where I could share my feelings without judgment from others.



Al-Anon is a spiritual program, not religious



Where are Al-Anon and Alateen group meetings held?

Our meetings are usually held in public locations such as libraries, hospitals, churches, or community centers. The Al-Anon groups are not affiliated with these institutions, which allow Al-Anon groups to meet on their premises for a nominal rental fee. Do not be concerned if the Al-Anon meeting you want to attend is held at a church that does not reflect your own beliefs. Religion and religious observances are "outside issues" for Al-Anon members and are not discussed at meetings.

What are "open" and "closed" Al-Anon meetings?

Anyone concerned about someone else's drinking is welcome to attend any Al-Anon meeting, "open" or "closed." An "open" meeting also welcomes guests and students. A "closed" meeting is exclusively for people troubled by someone else's drinking.

People of any religious belief—or none—are welcome

By Marcy P., California

Reading the Twelve Steps of Al-Anon was practically the first order of business at my first Al-Anon meeting. The Steps were introduced with the statement that they “represent a way of life appealing to all people of goodwill, of any religious faith or none.”

Nevertheless, the Steps talked about God quite a bit. I wasn’t comfortable with that. If God fixed everything, then why was my family falling apart?

The meeting ended with the statement, “Take what you like and leave

the rest.” So I thought I could live with that—as long as they’re serious about not forcing a religious viewpoint onto me.

Not only did they not try to force a religious viewpoint on me, religion isn’t even discussed during meetings. The Al-Anon program does ask that we believe in a power greater than ourselves but that “power” can be anything we choose.

Some folks do not believe in a superior, all-knowing being and they may choose for their group to be their Higher Power. Some people are very comforted with the thought of Mother Nature being “in charge” of the universe.

I chose my own Higher Power and I came to believe that it wasn’t all up to me to fix everything that was broken. I came to believe that I could and would receive some help.

Al-Anon enriched my spiritual life

By Gilda M., New York

“Al-Anon has opened my heart to a rich and full spiritual life that never ceases to amaze me. I feel connected and loved, with the freedom to have my own thoughts, ideas and feelings.”

I was uncomfortable in a church

I had a hard time with going to an Al-Anon meeting at a church. I am not a believer. I don’t go to church and I didn’t want to be in that environment.

When I overcame my resistance and went to my first Al-Anon meeting, I found that it was in a part of the

By Michelle M., Kansas
church used for social activities. I learned that the Al-Anon group pays rent to the church; the group uses the space at the church, but it is a separate organization. It doesn’t actually have anything to do with the church, so the location of the meeting is no longer an obstacle for me.

Al-Anon can still help, even if active alcoholism is no longer in your life



Why do members continue to attend Al-Anon or Alateen?

Personal growth and well-being is an on-going process. Al-Anon continually offers members fresh opportunities to learn about themselves and the effects of someone else's drinking. Members report that they gain new insights and use our program to "stay on track," and remain positive about life.

What if the drinker is in treatment or already sober?

Sobriety is also a new beginning for everyone close to the drinker. It's an opportunity for personal growth. Al-Anon can be a vital resource in the process of recovering from the effects of someone else's alcoholism.

I needed Al-Anon, even after the alcoholic in my life died

By Carol P., Texas

I attended Al-Anon when my younger sister went in for alcohol treatment. After she died at 47, I returned to Al-Anon with a greater urgency. My life was falling apart. I was filled with grief, anger, and fear.

I was unable to manage my life. I couldn't understand that all of our family's problems

weren't over because the alcoholic was gone. I was drinking, overeating, anxious, and fearful of a lonely, terrifying future. I had no plans, hopes, ambitions, or dreams. I was just getting through the day, surviving not living.

The Twelve Steps gave me a blueprint for personal recovery of self-love, honesty about my problems, and giving service to others. I've learned how to enjoy and treasure my life, honoring my sister's life and death as well.



I learn about myself in Al-Anon

By Arlene B., Michigan

Even though the alcoholic has not been drinking, I continue to attend meetings. I have learned a great deal about myself and how to take care of me. I have also learned how to listen with compassion and how to let go of my need to control everything. Somehow, I never really learned any of this before.

Perhaps my situation is not exactly the same as yours, but we are united in our fears, in our feelings of hopelessness, and in our effort to make changes in ourselves. Al-Anon has been a place of wonderful growth for me.

Al-Anon is:

- A program that applies spiritual principles but is not affiliated with any religion or religious organization. Al-Anon/Alateen includes people of different religious beliefs, as well as individuals who do not have any religious faith.
- A recovery program that is compatible with professional counseling, therapy, or treatment.

Al-Anon is not:

- Allied with any sect, political entity, organization, or institution.
- A program to help people achieve or maintain sobriety.
- Involved in any issues outside of our program—neither endorses, opposes, or has any opinion about any cause.



Do you wish the drinking would stop?

You have choices.
Al-Anon Family Groups can help.

How do I find an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting?

Call

1-888-4AL-ANON

(1-888-425-2666)

Monday-Friday, 8a.m. to 6 p.m. ET.

or visit

www.al-anon.alateen.org for meeting information.

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