



Al-Anon Family Groups
Pennsylvania Al-Anon Assembly
www.pa-al-anon.org

MEMO

To: PA AWSC Members

From: Lori F., Delegate PA 61

Date: May 5, 2022

Re: Recurring Question – Changing wording in our program

Changing wording in our program - *Response*

The following is my response to a recurring question regarding changing the wording in our program to suit issues other than alcohol and the family disease of alcoholism. I hope this response is helpful.

Question: Can we change the wording of our readings, Legacies and CAL to suit issues other than alcohol and the family disease of alcoholism?

Answer/Response:

To begin I would like to reference two of our Twelve Traditions that can guide us forward in answering this question. The requirement for group formation and membership eligibility is stated in Tradition Three which reads as follows:

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. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.*

And our purpose is clear and stated in Tradition Five.

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.*

Using these Tradition as the main focus of our framing, I would like to start by drawing your attention to our *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2022-2025 v1*, p. 134-135, [Dilution of the Al-Anon Program](#). It states that occasional discussion of drugs/narcotics is acceptable since at times a symptom of alcoholism may be the abuse of drugs. With that said, our responsibility is to ensure Al-Anon survival as a resource for family and friends of alcoholics. By focusing on these drug-related problems, we risk being diverted from Al-Anon's spiritual aim. These pages in the *Service Manual* also have a section on [Families with Related Problems](#). As you see in the *Service Manual* it permits limited discussion of drug topics but does not support replacing the word *alcoholic* with *addict* throughout our program. As you may already know, there are family groups for family and friends of addicts. That program of recovery is called Nar-Anon. Here is their website for further reference: <https://www.nar-anon.org/>

As far as changing the written Al-Anon word, I will note the following information to support why that is not done. While members are free to interpret the Steps, Traditions and our literature according to their own perceptions, Al-Anon's unity is preserved when they are read aloud as written in our meetings. It is not within the autonomy of the individual group to change the words when reading the Legacies or our CAL. Changing the wording of our Steps and Traditions is very similar to bringing outside literature into our meetings. The consistent use of CAL and reading our Three Legacies as they are written assures Al-Anon members that wherever they go throughout the world, Al-Anon's message of help and hope will remain clear and consistent.

In accordance with our Al-Anon World Service Conference Charter, Article 3-d: "**...no changes are to be made in the Traditions, Steps, Concepts of Service, or General Warranties of the Conference Charter (Item 12) without written consent of three quarters of the Al-Anon groups.**" - *Al-Anon / Alateen Service Manual 2022-2025 v1*, p. 228. A proposal to poll the groups worldwide on a change to our Legacies would have to be initiated by the World Service Conference (WSC), Al-Anon's largest group conscience. The purpose of the World Service Conference is to create the foundation of unity for Al-Anon as a whole. If the Conference should decide to propose a change to the legacies, a poll would have to be taken of all 24,000+ worldwide groups. The magnitude of this undertaking to change even one word in our Legacies illustrates the utter importance our fellowship places on this matter.

On an additional note, in a 1962 letter to all groups, our cofounder, Lois W. urged the fellowship to use the original wording of the Steps for the sake of unity. She said, "...We old-timers had witnessed many miracles of transformation in the lives of non-alcoholics brought about by the practice of A.A.'s Twelve Steps; the less change the better for us of Al-Anon. We realized if the Steps were altered once, they could be altered again and again. Their meaning and power might be lost"

In regard to welcoming, the art of welcoming involves us focusing on our sole purpose while allowing others to decide for themselves whether they are eligible for membership in Al-Anon. In *Paths to Recovery*, p. 180 it states the important of focusing on welcoming the newcomer.

Groups may feel they are not being welcoming by explaining to newcomers our primary purpose and our eligibility for membership. Welcoming goes hand in hand with carrying the Al-Anon message. There are many things we can do to help someone feel welcome that fall within the principles of our program. I have attached the [Welcoming Checklist](#). Maybe groups would find this helpful as they discuss the topic of welcoming.

Our Traditions, applied as written, actually allow for our program to be inclusive since we leave it up to the attendee to decide if they belong. Being able to relate to our common problem allows for people to get the greatest degree of help. And yes if they are not impacted by someone else's drinking, they may benefit from searching out a program more focused on their problem. For people who do not have a 12 step program specific to their issue and feel they do not meet our requirement for membership, they are still welcome to read our literature and attend Al-Anon meetings designated as "Open" or "Family, Friends, and Observers Welcome" to learn more about our program's principles. They are welcome to apply our principles to their life how they see fit outside an Al-Anon meeting.

I would also encourage groups to revisit and study the wording in the Suggested Al-Anon Preamble, Tradition Three and Tradition Five. Our purpose is clear and our Traditions helps us keep it simple which allows us to continue to carry the Al-Anon message in full strength. Having meeting topics on Tradition One, Three, Four, Five, Ten, and Eleven may be helpful. The pamphlet, *Al-Anon Spoken Here* (P-53) offers a good perspective on this topic as well and may make for an insightful meeting topic.

At time groups try to help people with issues beyond the scope of Al-Anon and encourage them to share beyond the workings of our program. When we do that we can in essence be preventing recovery for those who came to Al-Anon for help for the problem of the family disease of alcoholism. When we allow our meetings to bring in other issues we carry an inconsistent message that can leave new and old members, who do meet our requirement for membership, confused and doubt whether Al-Anon is even for them. They in turn may leave empty and not return, missing out on the gift of recovery. By trying to help a wider array of people, we help with less impact those who we really can help and come looking for our unique services. To summarize, when group unity suffers our common welfare suffers. In addition, when groups dilute our primary purpose they do affect Al-Anon as a whole.

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Permission to reprint Tradition Three and Five:

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