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3 Views of Al-Anon

For information and catalog of literature write to the World Service Office for Al-Anon and Alateen:

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This pamphlet is also available in: Dutch, French, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

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Approved by
World Service Conference
Al-Anon Family Groups

from the Other
Side of the Family

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AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS 
hope for families & friends of alcoholics

1.

The success of Al-Anon has not only been phenomenal, but I feel it is just about the biggest thing that has happened since AA began.

Growth-wise, as a movement, you have exceeded anything that ever happened to AA in its early days. And this is, we all know, because you people have been intent on filling the vast vacuum that has long existed in family relations.

For a long time we all wondered why the "honeymoon" didn't resume. We would say to the wife, "This AA is great stuff; come over to our meetings and get a load of it. We'll even allow you to make the coffee while you warm your hands at the spiritual fires of Alcoholics Anonymous." Happily, all of that is now in the past; you are commencing to fill, with tremendous rapidity and effect, that awful vacuum that has existed all along, which has affected half of our membership in this close family relation. Of course the family relation is the most difficult one, because it has been the most deformed.

Bill W., co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, at the First World Service Conference of the Al-Anon Family Groups, April 1961.

2.

THE ALCOHOLIC SPEAKS TO HIS FAMILY

I am an alcoholic. I need your help.

Don't lecture, blame or scold me. You wouldn't be angry at me for having TB or diabetes. Alcoholism is a disease, too.

Don't pour out my liquor; it's just a waste because I can always find ways of getting more.

Don't let me provoke your anger. If you attack me verbally or physically, you will only confirm my bad opinion about myself. I hate myself enough already.

Don't let your love and anxiety for me lead you into doing what I ought to do for myself. If you assume my responsibilities, you make my failure to assume them permanent. My sense of guilt will be increased, and you will feel resentful.

Don't accept my promises. I'll promise anything to get off the hook. But the nature of my illness prevents me from keeping my promises, even though I mean them at the time.

Don't make empty threats. Once you have made a decision, stick to it.

Don't believe everything I tell you; it may be a lie. Denial of reality is a symptom of my illness. Moreover, I'm likely to lose respect for those I can fool too easily.

Don't let me take advantage of you or exploit you in any way. Love cannot exist for long without the dimension of justice.

Don't cover up for me or try in any way to spare me the consequences of my drinking. Don't lie for me, pay my bills, or meet my obligations. It may avert or reduce the very crisis that would prompt me to seek help. I can continue to deny that I have a drinking problem as long as you provide an automatic escape for the consequences of my drinking.

Above all, *do* learn all you can about alcoholism and your role in relation to me. Go to open AA meetings when you can. Attend Al-Anon meetings regularly, read the literature and keep in touch with Al-Anon members. They're the people who can help you see the whole situation clearly.

I love you.

Your alcoholic.

Based on material which appears in *Guide for the Family of the Alcoholic*. Reverend Joseph L. Kellermann, Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, Inc., Virginia Beach, VA.

OPEN THE OTHER DOOR

Let the family into the blessed shelter offered by Al-Anon, even if the alcoholic is still nursing the bottle. It can give you a knowing ally.

I have become convinced that to "let the family alone till later" is one of the greatest sins of omission that a Twelfth-Stepper can make.

The alcoholic who has a family uses it to rationalize and evade the true difficulty. Much alcoholic behavior can be understood as a defense against the family's spoken or silent disapproval. The alcoholic's belligerent, aggressive, and abusive behavior is really a defense against real or imagined disapproval.

With the alcoholic's consent, or perhaps at the alcoholic's request, you visit on a Twelfth-Step call. Still, the alcoholic denies everything, rationalizes the problem, and attacks the family in such a convincing way that you almost believe what is said.

But don't go away saying you'll come back when the alcoholic is ready. Do something to make all this battling, rationalizing, and denying subside. Talk to the family and offer them help for themselves. You are present at a good time, a time when the conflict has surfaced for a moment. Tomorrow, and maybe for months to come, it will submerge again if you "let the family alone." Everybody will go back to their previous ways of muddling along, hoping for the best, afraid to rock the boat.

The help you can offer is Al-Anon. Al-Anon is primarily for the alcoholic's family, but I can think of no surer way to shorten the time to the alcoholic's own *real* admission that AA is needed, than the family's beginning its own recovery in Al-Anon.

In Al-Anon a family can learn things that are truly helpful to themselves and to the alcoholic, sober or drunk. By getting distance and perspective, the family regains a bit of sanity. By practicing the Twelve Steps themselves, they regain a

life worth living. Light, peace, and serenity appear where there had been nothing but agonizing doubt, fear, anger, and guilt.

What exactly do you offer? Well, general Al-Anon information and personal contact if you have that. Otherwise, give them the address of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters (their World Service Office): 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617. Or refer them to a local alcoholism information service, which may tell them how to contact Al-Anon in their area. You could carry with you at least one Al-Anon pamphlet; my favorite is *Guide for the Family of the Alcoholic*, obtainable from the Virginia Headquarters.

Now I want to go a step further and put myself out on a real limb. I feel that *any* information on AA given to an alcoholic who is not ready may actually delay recovery—unless this information is accompanied by constructive action by the family.

Let me explain this with a common example. A distraught wife calls AA on the phone or copies an announcement of an AA meeting from the newspaper. She hands the information to her husband. He consents to go and try. He goes, and maybe she even goes with him. But he feels that he was forced to go or that he was dragged there, and his resentment blooms. He can now say, "I went to AA and it didn't work!" As a matter of fact, both husband and wife can now say that they have tried everything and nothing worked. Years may go by without another try at AA.

Had this wife found information on Al-Anon *instead* of information on AA, she might have called Al-Anon. There, her appeal for information about AA for her husband would have been interrupted for what it really is (though she does not realize it), an appeal for help for herself. She *does not know what it is that she needs to know*. People in Al-Anon know some of the things necessary for her, like her stopping her efforts to manipulate the alcoholic, even in the direction of AA.

If you meet an alcoholic who is ready for you, “get him,” of course—but work on the family right away, too. If he is a new man at a meeting and his wife has come along, see to it that someone talks to her as an individual and not just an appendage of him and his problem. Someone would talk with her about her having been affected by his drinking and her need for Al-Anon. If the alcoholic comes alone, make every effort to get an Al-Anon member to call on his family right away.

Even if nobody in the family seems ready, do not neglect to talk about Al-Anon. The family may deny and resist now, but they may remember later when they get truly desperate—when they hit their bottom. They too suffer from shame, inadequacy, and guilt which make it difficult for them to admit that their man is an alcoholic and that he is sick. After they do admit it, sometimes years go by before he does. In this intervening time, it is much easier for them if they are able to admit their own need for help and their own powerlessness over alcoholism.

Am I saying, “Do your Twelfth Step work with the family, rather than with the alcoholic, and if you talk to them about anything, talk about Al-Anon?” Yes, I am.

Adapted from an article in *The Grapevine*, January 1969, © 1969. The Alcoholics Anonymous Grapevine, Inc., New York, N.Y.

THE SLOGANS OF AL-ANON

Let Go and Let God. No one has enough wisdom and power to cope with everything that happens in life. When baffled and frustrated by problems, *Let go*. Let the Higher Power restore order and peace to your life. It really works.

Live and Let Live. Have a design for your own life and live it fully—at your own pace. Discover your shortcomings and eliminate them one by one. Enjoy living, no matter what comes. Let others do the same; avoid criticizing and interfering.

Think. Taking the time to think and analyze can keep us from many errors and the trouble that results from impulsive speech and action.

First Things First. Sort out what is really important and attend to that first. This will create a sense of order and achievement while keeping unimportant matters from distracting and confusing you.

Easy Does It. More is accomplished when we take a relaxed approach to every situation. Our grandfathers said it this way, “The more haste, the less speed.” *Easy Does It* is a big help in all problem solving.

THE SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

Reflecting on each thought in the Serenity Prayer can help put situations into a clearer perspective.

Al-Anon books and ISBN listings:

Books

How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics

0-910034-26-5

Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage

0-910034-18-4

From Survival to Recovery: Growing Up in an Alcoholic Home

0-910034-97-4

Pamphlets

P-1 *Al-Anon IS for Men*

P-3 *Alcoholism, A Merry-Go-Round Named Denial*

P-4 *Alcoholism, the Family Disease*

P-7 *Guide for the Family of the Alcoholic*

P-9 *How Can I Help My Children?*

P-48 *Understanding Ourselves and Alcoholism*