

gant, smug, self-righteous and dominating; but we come because we want, we need—help.

“While we may have been driven to Al-Anon by the behavior of an alcoholic friend, spouse or child, a brother, sister or parent, we soon come to know that our own thinking has to change before we can make a new and successful approach to the problem of living. It is in Al-Anon that we learn to deal with our obsession, our anxiety, our anger, our denial, and our feelings of guilt. It is through the fellowship that we ease our emotional burdens by sharing our experience, strength and hope with others. Little by little, we come to realize at our meetings that much of our discomfort comes from our attitudes. We try to change these attitudes, learn about our responsibilities to ourselves, discover feelings of self-worth, love, and grow spiritually. The emphasis begins to be lifted from the alcoholics and placed where we do have some power—over our own lives.”<sup>2</sup>

2. *Alateen: Hope for Children of Alcoholics*, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., Virginia, 1973

### Other pamphlets which may be of help:

- P-4 *Alcoholism, the Family Disease*
- P-7 *Guide for the Family of Alcoholics*
- P-9 *How Can I Help My Children?*
- P-32 *This Is Al-Anon*
- P-47 *Al-Anon Sharings from Adult Children*

**Al-Anon may be listed in your telephone directory.**

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

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World Service Conference  
Al-Anon Family Groups

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## Understanding Ourselves and Alcoholism

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

## Understanding Alcoholism

“The American Medical Association recognizes alcoholism as a disease which can be arrested but not cured. One of the symptoms is an uncontrollable desire to drink. Alcoholism is a progressive disease. As long as alcoholics continue to drink, their drive to drink will get worse. If the disease is not arrested, it can result in insanity or death. The only method of arresting alcoholism is total abstinence.

“Alcoholism is a lifetime disease. Most authorities agree that even after years of sobriety, alcoholics can never again control their drinking once they start.

“There are many successful treatments for alcoholism today. Alcoholics Anonymous is the best known, and widely regarded as the most effective. Alcoholism is no longer a hopeless condition, providing it is recognized and treated.

“All kinds of people are alcoholics....Only about three to five percent of alcoholics are ‘bums’ or skid-row types. The rest have families, friends and jobs, and are functioning fairly well. But their drinking affects some part of their lives. Their family life, their social life, or their job life may suffer. It might be all three. An alcoholic is someone whose drinking causes a continuing and growing problem in any department of his/her life.

“Alcoholics drink because they think they have to. The use alcohol as a crutch and an escape. They are in emotional pain and use alcohol to kill that pain. Eventually, they depend on alcohol so much that they become convinced they can’t live without it. This is *obsession*.

“When some alcoholics try to do without alcohol, the withdrawal symptoms are so overwhelming that they go back to drinking because drinking seems to be the only way to get rid of the agony. This is *addiction*.

“Most alcoholics would like to be social drinkers. They spend a lot of time and effort trying

to control their drinking so they will be able to drink like other people. They may try drinking on weekends or drinking only a certain drink. But they can never be sure of being able to stop drinking when they want to. They end up getting drunk even when they had promised themselves they wouldn’t. This is *compulsion*.”<sup>1</sup>

It is the nature of this disease that the patients do not believe they are ill. This is *denial*. Hope for recovery lies in their ability to recognize a need for help, their desire to stop drinking, and their willingness to admit that they cannot cope with the problem by themselves.

1. *Alateen: Hope for Children of Alcoholics*, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., Virginia, 1973

## Understanding Ourselves

“Alcoholism is a “family” disease. Compulsive drinking affects the drinker and it affects the drinker’s relationships; friendships, employment, childhood, parenthood, love affairs, marriages, all suffer from the affects of alcoholism. Those special relationships in which a person is really close to an alcoholic are affected most, and the people who *care* are the most caught up in the behavior of another person. They react to an alcoholic’s behavior. They see that the drinking is out of hand and they try to control it. They are ashamed of the public scenes but in private they try to handle it. It isn’t long before they feel they are to blame and take on the hurts, the fears, the guilt of an alcoholic.

“These well-meaning people begin to count the number of drinks another person is having. They pour expensive liquor down drains, search the house for hidden bottles, listen for the sound of opening cans. All their thinking is directed at what the alcoholic is doing or not doing and how

to get the drinker to stop drinking. This is their *obsession*.

Watching other human beings slowly kill themselves with alcohol is painful. While alcoholics don’t seem to worry about the bills, the job, the children, the condition of their health, the people around them begin to worry. They make the mistake of covering up. They fix everything, make excuses, tell little lies to mend damaged relationships, and they worry some more. This is their *anxiety*.

“Sooner or later the alcoholic’s behavior makes other people angry. They realize that the alcoholic is not taking care of responsibilities, is telling lies, using them. They have begun to feel that the alcoholic doesn’t love them and they want to strike back, punish, make the alcoholic pay for the hurt and frustration caused by uncontrolled drinking. This is their *anger*.

Those who are close to the alcoholic begin to pretend. They accept promises, they believe, they want to believe the problem has gone away each time there is a sober period. When every good sense tells them there is something wrong with the alcoholic’s drinking and thinking, they still hide how they fell and what they know. This is their *denial*.

“Perhaps the most severe damage to those who have shared some part of life with an alcoholic comes in the form of the nagging belief that they are somehow at fault; they were not up to it all, not attractive enough, not clever enough to have solved this problem for the one they love. They think it was something they did or did not do. These are their *feelings of guilt*.

“We, who have turned to Al-Anon, have often done so in despair, unable to believe in the possibility of change, unable to go on as we have before. We feel cheated out of a loving companion, overburdened with responsibilities, unwanted, unloved, and alone. There are even those of us who are arro-