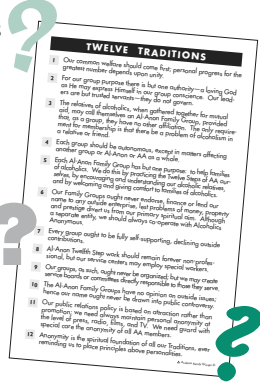


# Does the Board's Alateen Motion Violate Our Traditions?

By Barbara O., Associate Director of Member Services/Alateen

On December 8, 2003, the Board of Trustees passed a motion in a comprehensive effort to increase Alateen safety. It includes a requirement that areas must have minimum safety and behavioral requirements for all Alateen members and Al-Anon members involved in Alateen service. The motion references Concept Seven and Warranty Four, explaining that these principles give the Board of Trustees the authority and responsibility to protect the Alateen and Al-Anon names as well as our organizational identity.

One of the first questions I received from an Area Alateen Coordinator was, "Does this motion violate our Traditions?" Perhaps that question can best be answered by reviewing Al-Anon's history and involvement with Alateen. As early as 1954, the Clearing House (as the World Service Office was called at that time) recognized the special needs of the young family members of alcoholics by planning a special session on "Children of Alcoholics" for the 1955 Alcoholics Anonymous International Convention in St. Louis. Two years later in California Bob S., the teenage son of AA and Al-Anon parents, informed the Clearing House that a meeting of teenage children of AA and Al-Anon parents had started in that area. These teenagers had been attending Al-Anon meetings and wanted to meet separately with members their own age. The meetings patterned



themselves after Al-Anon, using the Steps, Traditions, and slogans.

By the end of 1960, Alateen groups numbered 115. New growth brought problems, however, as the number of Al-Anon members willing to be Alateen Sponsors remained sparse.

Since 1962 it has been repeatedly documented in the *World Service Conference Summary* (P-46) and reiterated in the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27), on page 182 of the 2002/2004 edition, that Al-Anon as a whole has been indifferent to Alateen, particularly in the area of sponsoring. In the early years, AA members and others filled the void in sponsoring our younger members. As the number of Alateen meetings grew, we began relying on newer members and older Alateens to be Sponsors. In many cases the only requirement for being a Sponsor was to be willing.

Over the years, the composition of the meetings changed. Children who had no parent in recovery began to attend meetings. Professionals, school personnel, and courts began recommending Alateen. Alateen members brought friends, younger children attended, and some meetings met at locations where there was no supporting Al-Anon meeting.

As Alateen meetings began separating physically from Al-Anon meetings, other transformations also took place. Alateen groups became less likely to send a representative to district and area meetings. Interactions between Alateen and Al-Anon groups decreased and problematic situations increased. Transportation became a problem, too; Sponsors and older Alateens began filling that need. Isolation compounded the Alateen problems as communication and interaction lessened, just as it had in many of our alcoholic families. An “us and them” attitude began to evolve; attitudes became distorted as separation and isolation increased.

In 1962 Alateens from several Eastern States gathered together with their Sponsors and formed the first Alateen conference. The early conferences were mostly informal events created to share experience, strength, and hope with Alateen groups from other areas. Alateen conferences grew rapidly, both in size and number, creating additional problems. Each conference was formed and organized autonomously with no common requirements for Sponsors or Alateens. Some conferences allowed

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**ALATEEN REGISTRATION/GROUP RECORDS CHANGE FORM**

Alateen Registration/Change forms are submitted to the WSO through your area process. Please check with your Delegate, District Representative or Area Alateen Coordinator for information on where to send this form.

(1) WSO I.D. Number  District Number  Area Number

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(2) Registration     New             Current             Not Sure If Registered             Disbanded

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(3) Group type is:     Closed             Institution             Limited Access

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(4) Changes:             Current Mailing     Group Name     Mtg Place     Mtg Time     Sponsor  
(Check all that apply)             Address (CMA)     Mtg Day             GR             Contact

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(5) Special Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

nonmembers to attend as Sponsors for the event. Some conferences were connected to their area structures, while others were not.

In 1999 the World Service Conference addressed growing concerns about Alateen by launching “Operation Alateen” and introducing the Alateen Group Sponsor Questionnaire form (GR-2). In 2000 and 2002 the World Service Conference passed motions regarding Alateen sponsorship. Several areas began developing their own area Alateen guidelines. This created a new problem, since there was no existing Al-Anon/Alateen policy to support those areas when they attempted to get members to comply with the guidelines.

Members serving our children were not held accountable to any part of the Al-Anon structure. The motions our trusted servants passed at World Service Conferences were considered by some as merely suggestions. Some Sponsors refused to complete the Alateen Group Sponsor Questionnaire and others, including nonmembers, were starting Alateen meetings without registering the groups. Yet when a problem arose, a call would often come to the World Service Office requesting the staff to take action. Those callers did not realize that Al-Anon had no policy to support taking any action.

The Board motion upholds, both individually and collectively, the Twelve Traditions of Al-Anon and Alateen. For the first time, Al-Anon has a unified policy regarding our interaction with younger members. The common welfare of Al-Anon and Alateen as a whole takes precedence over the actions of any one group or member—Tradition One in action.

After reviewing the group conscience decisions of previous World Service Conferences, the Board of Trustees expanded these recommendations into requirements. They also included other practical things that were in the former *Alateen Safety Guideline* (G-34), such as

**Tradition One**

**Tradition Two**

**Tradition Three**

**Tradition Four**

**Tradition Five**

**Tradition Six**

**Tradition Seven**

**Tradition Eight**

**Tradition Nine**

**Tradition Ten**

**Tradition Eleven**

**Tradition Twelve**

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having parental permission forms and requiring that Sponsors not have any felony convictions. This is an application of Tradition Two.

The most frequent question I receive is in regards to Tradition Three. Is it within the Traditions to prevent someone from being a Sponsor? Al-Anon's Third Tradition defines the membership of a group as "The relatives of alcoholics . . . The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend." Alateen's Third Tradition is similar, with the change "the teenage relatives of alcoholics" reflecting how it differs from Al-Anon.

The Board motion does not prohibit any Al-Anon member who meets the requirement stated in Tradition Three from attending Al-Anon. Nor does it keep any qualifying Alateen member from attending Alateen. The motion does set minimum requirements for Al-Anon members involved in Alateen service. Requirements are not new to Al-Anon—there are requirements for membership in Al-Anon and Alateen, for our Group Representatives, and for area world service committees, area officers, Delegates, and even Trustees. Alateen sponsorship is a privilege not a right.

Each Al-Anon and Alateen group is autonomous per Tradition Four. Groups can meet when and where they want, choose which Conference Approved Literature they want to use, and follow whatever format the group decides. What this Tradition does not do is give groups the ability to make decisions that harm Al-Anon, Alateen, or AA as a whole. When Alateen groups decide to allow nonmembers to be Sponsors, they are not adhering to Traditions Six, Seven, and Ten. This hurts the fellowship as a whole.

Does the Board's Alateen motion violate Traditions? The answer is no. Principles are being placed above personalities, in keeping with Tradition Twelve. The Board of Trustees' action, as the guardian of our most valuable assets—our children and our name—upholds the Traditions and provides the policy necessary for areas to do the same. The Board has the legal responsibility to protect Alateen and Al-Anon. Each member and group has the moral and ethical responsibility to protect the children in our care. We do this by applying the Traditions to the best of our ability. As your area moves to approve its requirements, please share them with the WSO.

## Inside Al-Anon

### Statement of Purpose

"Inside Al-Anon" presents news, policy, and commentary from volunteers, staff, and readers sharing experience through service.