

Southern California Policy for Resolving Group and Member Concerns

Possible Questions

1) How often do the Delegates receive questions regarding groups that may not be considering Al-Anon?

Delegates get calls regarding group problems about 6 times a month.

2) What do you mean by “do not refer?”

Group information is removed from local meeting lists, both printed and online. The group, however, remains active with voice and vote at Area Assembly, District, and Al-Anon Information Service (Intergroup) levels.

3) Why doesn't the WSO have a Do Not Refer Policy in the service manual?

As stated in the 2013 World Service Conference Summary: “once Areas have a policy in place, the World Service Policy Committee would discuss what role the World Service Office would play in supporting Areas who implement a ‘Do Not Refer’ policy.” Discussions have been taking place at the Conference since 2005. A 2011 WSO Thought Force identified several practices within meetings that fail to consider Al-Anon as a whole such as, but not limited to: high pressure groups; Alcoholics Anonymous “Big Book” study groups; modifications of the wording of the Steps, Traditions, Concepts and General Warranties; meditation meetings; and several other practices.

4) Why is it within the Area's autonomy to decide not to refer members and newcomers to a group?

At the 2012 World Service Conference, the Policy Committee encouraged service arms to identify principles that are important for an Area to consider when developing a policy regarding groups that are believed to be operating outside of the Legacies. (2012 Conference Summary, pg 97)
Once Areas have had this discussion and have policies in place, the Policy Committee would discuss what role the World Service Office would play in supporting Areas and groups who implement "do not refer" policies. (2013 Conference Summary, pg 100)

5) If my meeting is removed from a directory does that mean it's closed?

No.

6) Can the group be relisted?

Yes.

7) If I voice a concern about something that happened in my group, could the Area close my meeting?

No. According to the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2014-2017* (page 101) "In keeping with the Traditions and Warranty Five of Concept Twelve (see *Concept Twelve in "Al-Anon's Twelve Concepts of Service"*) local, Area, or WSO service entities have no authority to close a group or engage in other punitive actions against a group because they disapprove of the manner in which a group practices the Al-Anon program."

8) Why isn't taking a meeting off local directories (print and online) considered a punitive action?

According to a number of World Service Conference Summaries (2011, 2012, 2013) Areas are within their autonomy to develop policies regarding groups that do not follow the Legacies.

9) Does this mean that someone who disagrees with a group conscience decision can get the Area involved with group business?

Delegates are routinely asked for guidance on group practices. Most are resolved with education.

10) Is the Resolution Team formed every time there is a complaint made or clarification requested?

No. The concern may be resolved by education and/or conversation with an Area officer.

11) How did the Area decide it needed a policy for resolving group and member concerns?

After years of discussions at the World Service Conferences, Areas were encouraged to have a policy in place. In 2012, our Area Group Representatives voted to form a thought force: How can Southern California World Service support districts and Al-Anon Information Service (Intergroup) regarding groups whose activities do not consider Al-Anon as a whole? At the November 2014 Assembly, the Area's Group Representatives voted to form a task Force to draft a policy.

12) What about group autonomy? How can Southern California World Service tell a meeting what it can and cannot do, if the majority of its members have decided by group conscience to do something?

The Fourth Tradition says: “Each group is autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.”

This policy was developed as a resource for any individual, group, district, Al-Anon Information Service (Intergroup)/Literature Distribution Center, or any component of the Southern California World Service (SCWS) Area with concerns about conduct that might affect any Al-Anon member, group, or Al-Anon as a whole. It was developed after careful review of the Traditions, Concepts, and Warranties. According to a number of World Service Conference Summaries (2011, 2012, 2013) Areas are within their autonomy to develop do not refer policies regarding groups that do not follow the Legacies.

13) Sponsorship is a personal relationship. How can a group be held responsible?

This policy refers to groups that involve themselves in sponsor relationships, for instance groups with formally-structured and/or dictatorial sponsorship. This policy deals with the individual sponsor-sponsee relationship if a sponsee has questions or concerns about what their sponsor or their group is asking or requiring them to do.

14) How does what happens inside a group “affect Al-Anon as a whole?”

Tradition One says: “Our common welfare comes first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.” The Al-Anon name is not in the public domain; its use is controlled by the Board of Trustees. What a group does not only gets taken to other groups members attend, but it also gives newcomers an impression of Al-Anon as a whole. Tradition Three says relatives and friends of alcoholics can “...call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.” And, as stated in the Service Manual: “The World Service Office will register a group with the understanding that the group will abide by the Al-Anon Traditions and not affiliate with or endorse any outside entity or practice.”

15) What kinds of concerns created the need for this policy?

Members have reported concerns about: therapists calling therapy groups Al-Anon meetings and charging fees, the use of non-Conference Approved literature in meetings such as A.A. and other outside literature, groups creating their own literature, misuse of funds or groups financially tied to an outside entity, formally-structured and/or dictatorial sponsorship practiced by some groups, and the incorporation of outside therapies, such as meditation.

16) Why is A.A. literature considered “outside” literature, not to be used in an Al-Anon meeting?

According to the Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2014-2017, page 104:

“To keep Al-Anon’s message in focus and encourage unity, only Al-Anon/Alateen Conference Approved Literature and Al-Anon/Alateen service tools are displayed, distributed, and used at Al-Anon and Alateen meetings, including meetings at conferences and conventions. These items reflect the informed group conscience of the Al-Anon Family Groups as expressed by its World Service Conference since 1961.

“While individuals may use whatever they find helpful as part of their personal recovery outside of meetings, Al-Anon does not evaluate or recommend anything other than Al-Anon materials. When sharing at meetings, members limit any mention of outside material to a brief reference.

“A.A. literature is not used at Al-Anon meetings because it is written for and from the viewpoint of alcoholics and is not Al-Anon/Alateen Conference Approved Literature. Reliance on opinions expressed in A.A. and other outside materials can distort the Al-Anon approach.”

17) Do new meetings register through the Area (Southern California World Service SCWS) or the World Service Office?

It is important for meetings to register initially – and to update all service positions when they change – on the Area (SCWS) website. The information is automatically entered into the WSO database immediately. While it is technically possible to update forms on the WSO site, there is at least a week delay before the Area gets the information. This could lead, for instance, to groups not being able to vote at the Area Assembly because their information would not be processed by the voting deadline of two weeks before the Assembly. To register a new meeting or update group records, go to “Forms” on the SCWS website. Here is the link: http://www.scws-al-non.org/send_mtg_record_updates.php