

Southern California Policy
For Resolving Group and Member Concerns

(Area Meeting List Publishing Policy)

October 24, 2020

“In our Al-Anon Groups and service arms, our freedom is balanced with the responsibility to preserve our Traditions and abide by Al-Anon principles.”

-- Conflict Resolution Tool, “Autonomy: Freedom with balance”

“While we were responsible for conducting our meetings, we were asked to give primary consideration to the unity of Al-Anon as a whole.”

-- When I Got Busy, I Got Better

Approved by WSO, 3-11-20
(contingent upon Assembly approval)

Approved by SCWS Assembly, 10-24-20

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Policy Preamble

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

This policy was developed as a resource for any individual, Group, District, Al-Anon Information Service (AIS/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 Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts of Service, and General Warranties of the Conference, as well as the Policy Committee criteria presented at the 2012 World Service Conference.

The following principles guided the development of this policy:

- Al-Anon presumes good will, believing that every member of Al-Anon sincerely wants what’s best for individual members as well as Al-Anon as a whole.
- That, when concerns arise, they are first addressed by collaborative information-gathering and fact-finding. Concerns are discussed and reasoned out, beginning at the Group level, then they move through the links of service: Group first, then District, then Area, in order to include a broad Group of trusted servants in the conversation throughout the evaluation process.
- Any significant departure from Al-Anon’s spiritual principles and policies as outlined in Al-Anon’s Legacies – the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts – will first be addressed by education. The spiritual principles and policies referred to are discussed in the current edition of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, current *Al-Anon Guidelines*, and Conference Approved Literature.
- The focus of the discussion should be on the “common welfare,” or on how all parties involved—Groups, Districts, Areas and Al-Anon as a whole—are best served. Our links of service between Areas and Groups can help ensure all “stakeholder” voices are heard
- If problems remain after an educational process, there is opportunity to correct or clarify misunderstandings on either side before there is a recommendation, which may include removal of a Group from the online and printed directories.
- The Right of Appeal is built into the fact-finding process.

- There is a process by which a Group can become listed again.

- **The anonymity of all Al-Anon/Alateen/A.A. members will be respected throughout the *Policy* process.**

- “We feel free to express ourselves among our fellow Al-Anons because we can be sure that what we say will be held in confidence.”
- “Our dedication to anonymity gives people confidence in Al-Anon.”
- **Tradition Twelve, Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.**
- (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, Groups at Work, Optional Readings; Anonymity*)

- The explanation of Warranty Five in the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* states that “our Conference will always try to act with mutual respect and love, one member for another; that no action will be taken in anger, haste or recklessness; that care will be observed to protect all minorities; that no action will be personally punitive; that, whenever possible, important actions will be taken in substantial unanimity; and that our Conference will ever be prudently on guard against tyrannies, great and small, whether these be found in the majority or in the minority” (*Service Manual 2018-2021, Version 2, pg. 220*).

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The Policy

In order to consider the unity of Al-Anon as a whole, the clarity of its message, and to help ensure the safety of individual members, the Southern California Area refers members and newcomers to Groups that adhere to:

- (1) the current *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*
- (2) current Al-Anon *Guidelines*
- (3) the exclusive use of Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL)
- (4) the principles expressed in the “Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon” (*SM*, p. 22)
- (5) current editions of CAL regarding sponsorship: “Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover” (M-78), “Service Sponsorship” (P-88), “Sponsorship, What It’s All About” (P-31)

* “Current” is defined as at the time any issue is reported under the policy. The *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* and *Al-Anon Guidelines* can be downloaded for free from the WSO website.

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How the Policy Works

Reporting Concerns

Any individual may report concerns about Group practices through any means of communication. Those concerns will ultimately be directed to the Delegate (primary contact), Alternate Delegate, and Immediate Past Delegate/Area Chair (i.e. three SCWS Officers). There is a dedicated SCWS email account and mailing address for member concerns: groupandmemberconcerns@scws-al-anon.org. Emails to ‘groupandmemberconcerns’ will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Evaluation of Concerns

The three SCWS Officers will make an initial assessment of the concern.

If the concern is not severe enough to consider removing the Group’s listing from local directories, the issue may simply be resolved with education and/or a conversation with the group’s Group Representative (GR) and the pertinent District Representative (DR), and/or an Area Officer. The District and Al-Anon Information Service/Literature Distribution Center (AIS/LDC) should be made aware of the resolution, if appropriate.

If there is a determination that the reported concern needs more evaluation, the SCWS Officers contact the DR of the Group in question. The Officers will discuss the issue with the DR, and encourage the DR to contact the Group’s GR. If the Group does not have a GR, the DR will contact the Group’s Current Mailing Address (CMA) or another Group officer, such as their Secretary or Chairperson. The DR will ask the GR or Group’s officer to bring the concern to the attention of the Group’s members via a business meeting. The DR will work with the Group’s representative to use all appropriate CAL to assist with the discussion regarding the practice(s) in question.

If the concern is more complex than can be resolved using the process above, after consulting with the DR, the SCWS Officers may appoint a Resolution Team. The Resolution Team (RT) will be tasked with fact-finding, analyzing and categorizing the concerns regarding the Group(s). The RT members would not have a history with the respective Group(s), or have been active members of the Group in question. They will have been active in Al-Anon service at many levels and would be well-acquainted with the *Service Manual* and our three Legacies. The spiritual principles of democracy and carefully-balanced service authority apply to this fact-finding process. The Resolution Team will respect the anonymity of all members involved with the *Policy* process, and treat all communications (verbal and written) as confidential.

When appropriate, the Al-Anon Information Service/Literature Distribution Center (AIS/LDC) is informed that a fact-finding process is in progress.

Fact-Finding and Dialogue/Education

The individual (or RT) tasked with fact-finding begins by contacting the Group's GR (or other Group officer) to open a line of communication and to gather information. This collaborative dialogue will involve the Group itself, the Group's GR or Group's officers, the pertinent DR, as well as any affected members, thereby ensuring that everyone is informed of the relevant concerns and can exercise the right to participate actively in the education process.

The education process involves using CAL to explore the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of Service relevant to the Group's practices, and ensuring that the Group's practices are consistent with Al-Anon's Legacies and principles of the Al-Anon/Alateen program.

Resolution

Role of the District Representative (DR)

If the fact-finding and education process between the DR and the Group's members lead to a successful resolution of the concern, the DR informs the SCWS Officers of that outcome.

The SCWS Officers will inform the relevant AIS/LDC Office, if that is indicated.

If the fact-finding process does not lead to a successful resolution, the DR will inform the SCWS Officers, who will assume the responsibility of interacting with the Group in question. The SCWS Officers will review all of the actions taken to date, and will meet with the Group to continue the education process.

If this results in a change in the Group's practices, the SCWS Officers will inform the DR. The process stops at that point.

If this does not result in a change in the Group's practices, the SCWS Officers will take the issue to the SCWS Board (see below).

Role of the Resolution Team

After fact-finding, the Resolution Team (RT) will inform the SCWS Officers of their findings and recommendation in a written report. If they find that the concerns are not substantiated, the Officers will inform the DR and the Group of that outcome. The Officers will inform the relevant AIS/LDC Office of the outcome, if that is indicated.

If the RT finds that the concerns *are* substantiated, the SCWS Officers will inform the DR of that outcome. In collaboration with the DR, the Officers and DR will create a process for interacting

with the Group's GR and its members, preferably at a Group business meeting, to discuss the RT's findings. The DR and Area Officers will educate the Group's members, using CAL, and engage in open discussion with the aim of reaching resolution and consensus. Our hope is that a substantial majority of the Group's members will be able to support decisions that align the Group's practices with Al-Anon Legacies. (Note: this process may extend over the course of several meetings)

If there is no resolution after the process described above, the RT and SCWS Officers may recommend that the meeting in question be removed from listing in local directories/websites. That recommendation, along with the RT Report, would be brought to the Area Board before a final decision is made.

Role of the SCWS Board

If the concern is *not* resolved with conversation and education, the three SCWS Officers will discuss the matter with the Southern California World Service (SCWS) Board members. Board members will "reason things out" with the Officers to see if there are any novel solutions to the dilemma that have not yet been attempted. If there are, the Area Officers will engage in more dialogue with the Group's GR/officers.

If after KBDM discussion, and continued education with the Group's officers, there is still no resolution of the problematic practice(s), then the SCWS Board may vote to recommend that the Group be removed from local AIS office's local (online and printed) directories. This vote is conducted keeping in mind the principle and spirit of substantial unanimity.

The Group is first informed of the decision in a conversation with the Delegate, and then, in writing by certified mail, is provided with the actions/changes needed in order to retain its listing(s).

If the recommendation involves removing the Group from local meeting directories, the original reporting individual is informed of the outcome, as are the District and AIS(InterGroup)/LDC.

In addition, the SCWS Officers will inform the World Service Office (WSO) of the process and result of our deliberations, and will ask them to remove the Group from its online directory.

The Delegate will ensure that the Group is educated about their rights, as a registered Al-Anon meeting. That is, according to the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* and the *Al-Anon Information Services Guidelines (G-4)*, if a Group is removed from online and printed directories, the Group still remains active with voice and vote at the Area Assembly, District, Literature Distribution Center (LDC) and/or Al-Anon Information Service (InterGroup). In addition, the Delegate will ensure that the Group fully understands the process to appeal the decision and petition for relisting as outlined in the *Area Policy*, should they wish to do so.

The SCWS Area will continue its practice of ongoing communication with all Area Al-Anon groups, including those removed from local listings, and will have an open dialogue regarding what

some groups may need to change in order to be displayed again on the meeting list. The emphasis would be on unity within Al-Anon and our common welfare. The Area will also encourage mutual aid between groups by inviting and encouraging members to actively participate in District and Area events.

Archiving

A full report of the fact-finding and decision is confidentially archived to ensure that future SCWS Officers with a need to know are aware of the history of any reported concern that warranted the creation of a Resolution Team.

Right of Appeal / Relist Process

The Group may submit a request to be relisted to the SCWS Officers. The request should include the Group's corrective actions since the Group was removed from local meeting directories.

Within 30 calendar days of the receipt of the request to relist, the SCWS Officers will respond in writing to the authors to acknowledge the request. The Officers will submit the request to the SCWS Board, which will determine the steps to take to evaluate the Group's corrective actions. The Board will review the request and will vote on whether or not to engage the relisting process.

The relisting process that follows will be similar to the original: fact-finding involves discussions and conversations between the Group's GR and members, and the DR, Area Officers and SCWS Board. The creation of another Resolution Team to engage in a new round of fact-finding may be indicated. As during the original process, CAL will be used to explore the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of Service relevant to the Group's practices, with the hope of ensuring that the Group's practices are consistent with Al-Anon's Legacies, and that the Group's members are committed to continuing those practices.

Should the Group's practices be determined to have changed to be consistent with the Legacies, the Board will vote to recommend that the Group be relisted in the local AIS Office Directory. The Delegate will contact the local AIS Office and the WSO to ask them to relist the Group in their respective directories.

Conclusion

At all levels, the primary keystones of our process will be the presumption of goodwill and the desire to foster an open, safe, and respectful environment for discussion. It is our hope that education and conversation will resolve most concerns, under the guidance of our Higher Power.