

What is a Healthy Meeting?

**Southern California World Service
Assembly Presentation
November 20, 2021**

Part 2

History and Background

We receive emails and questions from members about various customs and practices at meetings that are concerning to them. These are the broad topics that our members bring up most frequently:

- ❖ Sponsorship
- ❖ Dominance
- ❖ Newcomers
- ❖ **Literature**
- ❖ **Affiliation with Outside Entities**
- ❖ **Group Autonomy**
- ❖ **Financial Management**

We will cover the **four topics in bold** in this presentation. (The first three topics were presented at the Assembly on May 15, 2021.)

The first thing we do to address the concern is research the Conference Approved Literature (CAL) that is pertinent to the issue at hand.

The following considerations re: “healthy meetings” are based on:

- *Our Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*
- Other pertinent CAL related to the topic
- *Southern California Policy for Resolving Group and Member Concerns* (<https://www.scws-al-anon.org/area-policies/>)

Literature

Use of Conference Approved Literature (CAL)

- ❖ As we look to our literature we find the importance of sticking to Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL). Our literature contains a unified message, consistent in principle and language, and great care is taken to see that this literature adheres to our principles before it is Conference Approved.” (*Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.172*)
- ❖ “Members are now encouraged to use only Al-Anon literature at meetings. Through CAL the whole fellowship can be united by reading materials developed and approved by Al-Anon’s WSC. Such action affected Al-Anon as a whole in a positive way, encouraging unity. Unity through literature has also helped us communicate with each other in terms that represent the fellowship as a whole.” (*Paths to Recovery, p.163*)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ “Experienced Al-Anon members introduce newcomers to the Al-Anon program through Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature and the first three Steps, as well as inform them about the far-reaching effects of the family disease of alcoholism.”
(Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, 2018-2021, v-2, p.31)
- ❖ “Between meetings and when other people are not available, Al-Anon literature can offer us the comfort of knowing that our problems are not unique and we are not alone... Our pamphlets and books provide valuable information about the disease of alcoholism and how to cope with its effects.”
(How Al-Anon Works, B-22, p.40)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

“At some meetings, members have introduced literature which has not been Conference Approved but which they felt was superior to our own. In the early days of our fellowship, when there was little or no literature available, it was helpful to have some groups voluntarily produce some small leaflets which were sent wherever they were needed. But with the growth of Al-Anon, it has become important to have the message consistent in keeping with the principles of the program.

In the early 1960's, the World Service Conference agreed that all Al-Anon literature should be Conference Approved. One by one, the early productions dropped out, and our literature is now published only by the World Service Office, with every piece submitted to the Conference for its approval.” (*Al-Anon's Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions*, p. 102)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ “Cooperation between Al-Anon and A.A.: There is, of course, a great deal of reading value in literature other than that which is Al-Anon Conference Approved. But it is not the purpose of Al-Anon to make its members familiar with all the approaches—only the Al-Anon approach. Those who wish to acquaint themselves with A.A. reading material can readily find it at an A.A. open meeting.” (*Al-Anon Guidelines, Cooperation Between Al-Anon and A.A.* G-3)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ “Then someone asks, “What about A.A. literature; is it Conference Approved? Yes, it is approved **by A.A.’s** General Service Conference **for A.A.--but not for Al-Anon**. At home I can read whatever I please, but when I come to meetings, I leave those things outside.”
(*Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.172, Tradition Four*)
- ❖ “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.”
(*SM p.113*)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ “Today, I am grateful to a Sponsor who kept me going back to the Traditions to expand my limited thinking. I am also grateful to home groups that continued to love me while being persistent about using only Conference Approved Literature at meetings.” (*Many Voices, One Journey, B-31, p.252*)
- ❖ “Al-Anon meetings and Conference Approved Literature brought me back to life. Daily readers inspired me to get out of bed in the morning. Al-Anon meetings gave me a sense of purpose and direction not only on the highway, but also in life.” (*Many Voices, One Journey, B-31, p.339*)
- ❖ “Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature has been a lifesaver and a life changer for me.” (*Discovering Choices, B-30, p.297*)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ No CAL refers to any other CAL publication as “Al-Anon’s Big Book.”
- ❖ *How Al-Anon Works* (B-22, 1995) was written to replace *The Al-Anon Family Groups*. They wanted this new book to reflect “...the universality of Al-Anon/Alateen today, instead of reworking B-5.” (*Many Voices, One Journey*, B-31, p. 269).
- ❖ Al-Anon does not have or make “Promises.” You can find the history of this issue in *Many Voices, One Journey*, pgs. 198, 265, 304-5.

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ **“Dilution of the Al-Anon Program Outside Therapies...the Sixth Tradition suggests that there be no promotion or endorsement of any outside therapies.**

Labels

Focus on the Al-Anon interpretation of our program is strengthened when we avoid using professional terms and labels since they may confuse members by implying affiliation with certain persons or specific therapies.”

(SM, P-24/27, p.132)

Literature

(Use of CAL, cont'd)

- ❖ Why can't we show *any and all* CAL on our screens during virtual meetings?
- ❖ What CAL *can* we show on the screens during our virtual meetings?

The answers to these and other “posting literature on the screen” questions can be found here:

<https://www.scws-al-anon.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/TO-SHARE-OR-NOT-TO-SHARE-ON-THE-SCREEN.pdf>

The next slides present questions/scenarios about **Literature**.

Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,
which of the answers provided seem to be the best "fit?"

You might come up with solutions that are even better!

[Hint: the **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Conference Approved Literature

Scenario #1:

You attend a meeting with a poster of “The Promises” at the front of the room, along with the Steps and Traditions. This poster is read along with the Steps and Traditions at the beginning of every meeting. What do you do?

Conference Approved Literature

Which of the following solutions to Scenario #1 is most consistent with our principles?
You might come up with solutions that are even better!

1. Become the Literature Chair and refuse to put out the poster.
2. Interrupt the person who's reading from the poster and inform them that Al-Anon doesn't have or make promises.
3. Write to the World Service Office (WSO) and complain about this practice at this Group.
4. **Find out when when the Group holds business meetings, and ask for the topic of "The Promises" to be placed on the agenda. Bring CAL that refers to "the Promises" and have a Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM) discussion about whether the Groups members want to continue to read the poster, once they are educated about the issues involved.**

Conference Approved Literature

Scenario #2:

One of your Group's members brings the A.A. Big Book to your meeting and reads passages from it during his share, and states that since our Twelve Steps are adapted from A.A., we may read from A.A. literature at our meetings. What do you do?

Conference Approved Literature

1. Interrupt this member when he's reading, and tell him to stop because this is Al-Anon, not A.A.
2. Ask the Leader not to call on this member when it's time to share.
3. **Ask to share and read aloud this passage from our *Service Manual* (p. 113), without further comment:**

“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.”

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to “Affiliation with Outside Entities”

- ❖ Traditions related to outside affiliation:
 - Tradition 3: “The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves and Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.
 - Tradition 6: “Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.”
(SM, p. 15)

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to “Affiliation with Outside Entities”

- ❖ “The WSO 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.” (SM, p.34)
- ❖ “At an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting or meeting location, groups do not announce, publicize, or discuss activities of other Twelve Step programs, as this could create an appearance of affiliation or endorsement, even if the event or activity is composed primarily of Al-Anon or Alateen members.” (SM, p.54)

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to Affiliation with Outside Entities (cont'd)

- ❖ “The fellowships of Al-Anon (which includes Alateen for its younger members) and A.A. have a unique relationship. They were closely allied in their origins and are naturally drawn together by their family ties. Yet the Twelve Traditions emphasize that each works more effectively if it remains separate.”
- ❖ “Tradition Six specifically states that Al-Anon and A.A. are separate entities. Therefore, in keeping with this Tradition, there can be no combining, joining, or uniting which would result in the loss of identity of either fellowship.” *Al-Anon Guidelines, G-3: Cooperation between Al-Anon and A.A.*

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to Affiliation with Outside Entities (cont'd)

- ❖ “It should not be forgotten that we are a fellowship separate from A.A. with a different focus, but we often cooperate to bring recovery to all in need of it...The understanding of each fellowship of the many aspects of alcoholism and reactions to it can be expanded by such cooperation as long as both fellowships remain separate and available to their own members. Our primary spiritual aim of helping families and friends of alcoholics is best accomplished when we stick to Al-Anon principles, focusing only on Al-Anon recovery.”

(Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.187-8)

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to Affiliation with Outside Entities (cont'd)

- ❖ “As a group or fellowship, we cannot finance anything or anybody other than Al-Anon.
- ❖ We do not lend our name to any outside enterprise. There is no such thing as an Al-Anon clubhouse any more than there is an A.A. clubhouse.
- ❖ We cannot form combined A.A. and Al-Anon groups--groups might be either A.A. or Al-Anon, not both.”

(Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.190)

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to Affiliation with Outside Entities (cont'd)

- ❖ “The Al-Anon/Alateen name, therefore, cannot properly be used to identify or publicize retreats, events or activities sponsored by others. This applies when most or even all of the participants are members of Al-Anon/Alateen. Otherwise there could be a misunderstanding of Al-Anon’s purpose and function. In order to avoid any appearance of Al-Anon/Alateen affiliation, it is important to keep promotion of such events outside of Al-Anon/Alateen meetings and meeting locations.” (SM, p. 92)

Affiliation with Outside Entities

CAL related to Affiliation with Outside Entities (cont'd)

- ❖ “We might ask how to determine whether something is an outside issue...If we are unsure whether or not something is an outside issue, we might apply the following questions to it: Does it fall within Al-Anon’s single purpose--to help families and friends of alcoholics? Does my group, as a group, have a stake in this? Might discussions of this matter result in involvement in public controversy?
- ❖ If we have been adhering to the Traditions, we know our own house is in order.”

(Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.220-221)

The next slides present questions/scenarios about

Affiliation with Outside Entities

Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,
which of the answers provided seem to be the best "fit?"
You might come up with solutions that are even better!

[Hint: the **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Affiliation with Outside Entities

Scenario #1:

One of your Group's most beloved long-time members is in the hospital and a fellow member suggests during the meeting that the Group use 7th Tradition funds to send flowers to her. What do you do?

Affiliation with Outside Entities

1. Go along with the suggestion in order not to draw attention to yourself or appear to be cheap or ungenerous.
2. Interrupt the member who made the suggestion and inform her that this is not an acceptable use of 7th Tradition funds and that it was inappropriate of her to suggest it.
3. **Ask the meeting's members to have a short Business Meeting after the meeting is over to discuss whether or not to use Group funds for the flowers. Suggest that individual members might contribute personally to purchase flowers.**

Affiliation with Outside Entities

Scenario #2:

The pastor of the church where you meet comes in at the start of your meeting and explains that the church is in bad financial shape and wants you to contribute to the church's endowment fund. What do you do?

Affiliation with Outside Entities

1. Figure out how much your Group can contribute to the church without jeopardizing your Group's financial health.
2. Create an "extra 7th Tradition" collection during the meeting to give to the church.
3. **Discuss this request at a Group Business Meeting. Determine how much your Group could afford to pay in increased rent, if anything. Explain to the Pastor the principle that we do not donate to outside entities, but that your Group could increase your rent by \$_____ amount per week/month. If that is not acceptable, prepare to find a new location for your meeting.**

Affiliation with Outside Entities

Scenario #3:

You have to find a new location and learn about a private treatment center that hosts several A.A. and Al-Anon meetings, and they don't charge rent. You read on their contract that a condition of meeting at the center is that every AA and Al-Anon Group must participate in occasional outreach fairs and activities for the treatment center. What do you do?

Affiliation with Outside Entities

1. Sign the agreement but ignore that condition--and hope that they don't notice.
2. Sign the agreement but have one of your Group's members, who is an attorney, threaten to sue them if they try to follow through on that part of your rental agreement.
3. **Explain to the treatment center administrators our principle of not affiliating with outside entities and ask if they will accept rent as your only obligation to them. If not, prepare to find another place to meet.**

Group Autonomy

Conference Approved Literature (CAL) related to “Group Autonomy”

- ❖ Tradition Four: Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other group or Al-Anon or A.A. as a whole. (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, 2018-2021, v-2, p.15*)
- ❖ “Does this mean that in Al-Anon anything goes as long as the group agrees to it? Certainly not. There is an important principle that needs to be observed to avoid severe difficulties--autonomy is necessary “except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or A.A. as a whole. Each of us is charged with the responsibility to think about the possible effects of our decision on Al-Anon itself.” (*Paths to Recovery, B-24, p. 166*)

Group Autonomy

CAL: Group Autonomy (cont'd):

- ❖ “However the Tradition cautions us to be sure that decisions made by our group do not affect another group adversely or present an unfavorable or inaccurate picture of Al-Anon or A.A. as a whole.” (*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p. 163)
- ❖ “Meetings differ because each group is free to make many decisions for itself.” “The only restriction on this freedom is that the well-being of Al-Anon and A.A. must take precedence over the interest of any one group. As we saw in the First Tradition, our unity is essential to our survival as a fellowship. No group should make decisions that would detract from that unity.” (*How Al-Anon Works*, B-22, p. 111)

Group Autonomy

CAL: Group Autonomy (cont'd):

- ❖ “In this Tradition it is important that we see the comma after the word autonomous; it is not a period, but a comma. We often hear immature people say, ‘I have a right to do whatever I want,’ without remembering that it their decision only as long as it doesn’t affect others...The rights of one person cannot supersede the rights of another. This is important in learning to work with others in a mature way. All of life is give and take...We learn to think a situation through and examine our motives.” (*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p.171)
- ❖ “Tradition Four helped me sort out the difficult issues.” (*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p.168)

Group Autonomy

CAL: Group Autonomy (cont'd):

- ❖ “As in life, freedom in Al-Anon carries with it responsibility. We wish to preserve the working principles of the fellowship that have served us well and have helped us recover.” (*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p.165)
- ❖ “The groups have many freedoms; there are no bosses. That is why it is so important that we understand our responsibility to obey the unenforceable.” (*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p.172)
- ❖ “The more freedom I have, the more I must be willing to take responsibility for myself and my behavior and how it will affect others or the group as a whole.” (*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p.173)

Group Autonomy

CAL: Group Autonomy (cont'd):

“. . . Once a group conscience decision is made, the entire group supports the decision.

Concept Five tells us that members have the right of appeal. If a member disagrees with the outcome of a group conscience decision, they have the right to submit an appeal for reconsideration back to the body that made the decision. After an appeal is heard, regardless of whether the decision is maintained or altered, the individual accepts the group conscience.” (SM, p. 51)

The next slides present questions/scenarios about

Group Autonomy

Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,
which of the answers seem to be the best "fit?"

You may come up with solutions that are even better!

[Hint: the **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Group Autonomy

Scenario #1:

Your Group creates a Steering Committee to decide how to keep the focus on Al-Anon, as you are attracting members of A.A. who do not yet know our custom of keeping their anonymity and identifying only as an Al-Anon member when participating. The Steering Committee decides to put this statement in the format: “If you are a member of A.A., you may listen but not share during our meeting.” What do you do?

Group Autonomy

1. Don't say anything -- because you don't want to create controversy and get members of the Steering Committee angry with you.
2. Write to the Area using the groupandmemberconcerns@scws-al-anon.org to "tell on" the members of the Steering Committee with the hope that a Board member will challenge their decision.
3. **Hold a Business Meeting to discuss how to handle the situation when A.A. members don't yet know our customs and traditions and share about their A.A. histories. Use CAL and discuss Tradition 3, "The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or a friend." Work with members of the Steering Committee to come up with a statement in your format such as, "If you are a member of any other recovery program, please keep your anonymity and identify only as an Al-Anon member when participating."**

Group Autonomy

Scenario #2:

Some members of your home Group are upset about the “traditional” wording of the Twelve Steps and Traditions. They decide to add to the meeting’s format the suggestion that members may use any pronouns (for God) they wish, and change the wording of the Steps/Traditions in whatever way they like. What do you do?

Group Autonomy

1. Become the Secretary of the meeting and only call on people who don't change the wording.
2. At a Business Meeting, tell the other members that what they're doing is wrong and that you won't come to the meeting in the future if they keep doing it.
3. **At a Business Meeting, discuss “obedience to the unenforceable,” and the World Service Conference Charter #3 (d). “No changes are to be made in the Al-Anon or Alateen Traditions, the Steps, the Concepts of Service . . . or the General Warranties of the Conference Charter. . . without written consent of three-quarters of the Al-Anon Family Groups.” Discuss how allowing this change in wording at your meeting could “affect Al-Anon or A.A. as a whole.”**

Financial Management

CAL related to “Financial Management”:

- ❖ **Tradition 6:** Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. (SM, p.15)
- ❖ “There are no dues or fees to attend Al-Anon or Alateen meetings.”
“Group contributions support all levels of Al-Anon service including the District, the local Al-Anon Information Service, the Area, and the World Service Office.” (SM, p. 55)
- ❖ “Keeping Al-Anon a safe place where we can come for comfort and solutions means it must not be a place where we feel pressured or obligated to buy anything.” *Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p. 186

Financial Management

CAL related to Financial Management (cont'd):

- ❖ “In keeping with Traditions Six and Seven,
 - the group does not provide financial aid to members in need or to any outside enterprise. Individuals are free to help others in need as they choose; however it is always without involving Al-Anon’s name or other group members.”
 - “A group is discouraged from giving all of its funds to an outside entity such as a clubhouse even as a condition of using the meeting room.”
 - “Al-Anon groups are not responsible to support a clubhouse, other than paying rent.” (SM, p.56)

Financial Management

CAL related to Financial Management (cont'd):

- ❖ “That only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle.” Concept Twelve, Warranty One
- ❖ Being prudent with our finances means we are conservative and thoughtful in our planning. We maintain an ample reserve to cover future needs yet we don't accumulate a significant excess. Our available funds serve Al-Anon...Warranty One reminds us to take care of ourselves financially without excessive spending or stockpiling. (Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.325)
- ❖ “A reserve is a way of helping me to not overextend while still relying on a Power greater than myself to resolve any problems. I do the footwork, make the plans and then leave it in His hands without planning the results.” (Paths to Recovery, B-24, p.331)

Financial Management

CAL related to Financial Management (cont'd):

- ❖ Suggested duties of the Treasurer: (excerpt of list of duties below)
 - Maintains the group's financial records...
 - Asks another member to help count and record the collection
 - Submits a financial statement to the group at regular intervals (SM, p.60)

- ❖ “It is not recommended that group funds be deposited into a member's personal account as such accounts legally belong to the member, not the group, and accurate record-keeping could be difficult.” (SM, p. 58)

Financial Management

CAL related to Financial Management (cont'd):

- ❖ From Al-Anon Guidelines, G-41: *Reserve Fund Guidelines*:
 - Are all members in our group familiar with our group, district, and Area financial needs?
 - Does our group rotate its service positions, such as Treasurer?
 - Do we require more than one person's name/signature on the bank account?
 - Do I participate in the financial discussions so that my voice is heard?
 - Have we ever withheld funds because we disagreed with a decision made by a group conscience of a larger Al-Anon service body? If so, for how long? At what point do we accept that group conscience?

The next slides present questions about

Financial Management

Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,

which of the answers seem to be the best “fit?”

You might come up with solutions that are even better!

[Hint: the **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Financial Management

Scenario #1:

You attend a meeting at which the Treasurer position doesn't rotate and has been held by one member for several years. The Treasurer does not give regular Treasurer's reports; when you ask for a report the Treasurer says that all of the bills are being paid and that there is no need for a report. What do you do?

Financial Management

1. Insist on becoming the new Treasurer for the meeting the next time the service positions change and point out that service positions should rotate.
2. Become the Secretary of the group so that you can have signing privileges on the Group's checking account and find out about the Group's finances that way.
3. **At a Business Meeting about the Group's finances, distribute copies of the *Reserve Fund Guideline (G-41)* which contains a "Group Financial Inventory" and ask for the Group to take an inventory on the Group's finances, their prudent reserve, their budget, and how the Group is participating in managing its funds.**

Financial Management

Scenario #2:

You attend a meeting at which several members of the Group are upset about a recent decision made at the Area Assembly and they vote to withhold contributing any Group funds to your Area and the WSO “in protest.”

Financial Management

1. Applaud the Group's members for exercising their autonomy over Group funds in this way.
2. Criticize the Group's members for exercising their autonomy over Group funds in this way.
3. **At a Group Business meeting,**
 - a) **use the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making questions to explore the issue of whether or not to contribute Group funds to the Area and WSO. In addition, discuss this question from the *Reserve Fund Guideline, G-41*: "Have we ever withheld funds because we disagreed with a decision made by a group conscience of a larger AI-Anon service body? If so, for how long? At what point do we accept that group conscience?"**
 - b) **Using Concept Five, "The rights of appeal and petition protect minorities and insure that they be heard," discuss bringing a "minority appeal" to the body that made the decision with which your members disagree. (*SM, p. 185*)**

Questions?

...then

Comments

We will proceed to questions and comments now.

If we are unable to get to all of them, members can contact us at:

groupandmemberconcerns@scws-al-anon.org