

# Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism 2009

*Are you **troubled** by someone's **drinking**?  
Al-Anon Family Groups can help.*



*To Help Them You Have To Help Yourself First*

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#### **Note:**

The professional opinions in this magazine belong to the writer only. Al-Anon Family Groups does not endorse or oppose outside entities, opinions, or issues.

Thank you to Al-Anon’s professional friends who refer patients and clients to Al-Anon Family Groups. Thirty-six percent of adult Al-Anon members said a referral from a professional was the most important factor in influencing them to attend Al-Anon, according to our 2006 Al-Anon Membership Survey.\*

\*Survey details are available at [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)

Dear Reader,

Shattered pictures, broken dreams, overwhelming sadness, nowhere left to turn: that's what many families and friends of problem drinkers deal with on a daily basis. Even asking a professional for help seems impossible—money is tight, there's so little time available, and the problem drinker resists the idea of treatment. We bargain, plead, and threaten to leave—but nothing seems to work. The situation is stressful and often seems hopeless.

I understand all of those emotions because that is exactly where I was before I came to my first Al-Anon meeting. I didn't understand how talking to strangers about my problems could help. Yet it did. The Al-Anon members in my first meeting—like members at other meetings around the world—understood what it's like to live with a problem drinker.

In *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism 2009*, Al-Anon members tell their stories; therapists and other professionals also share their perspectives. Hope and help are available, whether the problem drinker has stopped drinking or not.

Many doctors and therapists recommend Al-Anon Family Groups because they know their patients and clients can find understanding and support there. Al-Anon meetings support everyone affected by someone's drinking; members discover that there are positive steps they can take to make their lives better.

It might seem overwhelming to make just one more decision or impossible to find a single hour to get some help. Yet asking for help or making that phone call to find a local Al-Anon meeting could make a huge difference in your life.

We have nothing to lose when we walk into an Al-Anon Family Group. We gain the chance for a new perspective on life—an opportunity to find freedom from despair. I hope to see you in a meeting soon.

In fellowship,



Ric B.

Executive Director  
Al-Anon Family Groups

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## Al-Anon and Alateen members share their experiences

### What are Al-Anon Family Groups?

The family and friends of problem drinkers meet together in Al-Anon Family Groups for mutual support. Our groups hold meetings in public locations, such as libraries, churches, or community centers.

Stories in this magazine present Al-Anon and Alateen members' personal opinions and experiences. In keeping with Al-Anon's Eleventh Tradition\* regarding anonymity, this magazine credits members without using last names. No one whose full face appears in this publication is a member of Al-Anon or Alateen.

\*Visit [www.al-anon.alateen.org/legacies.html](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/legacies.html) to read Al-Anon's Traditions.

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## From 'Family Week' to family recovery

*By Christine McKaskle, Family Counselor*

*Christine McKaskle is a Family Counselor at Cumberland Heights Alcohol and Drug Treatment Center in Nashville, Tennessee.*



Although "Family Week" at the treatment center where I work offers important insights and memorable experiences, a single week cannot repair the damage done to a family affected by alcoholism. Families need lifelong support for dealing with the effects of this lifelong disease. That's why my colleagues and I encourage family members to participate in Al-Anon and Alateen.

Our center has an Al-Anon meeting onsite. This meeting is not affiliated with the treatment center. Rather, a caring group of Al-Anon members hold an introductory meeting at the center for newcomers. Attendance is optional, but it gives families a chance to see how Al-Anon differs from fam-

ily therapy and complements it.

One of my clients, the mother of a fourth-generation alcoholic, realized the family disease had kept her feeling frightened and alone her entire life. "I never knew this kind of support was possible. I'm going to go home and get myself to an Al-Anon meeting. I'm not going to do this alone anymore," she said.

Thanks to Al-Anon and Alateen, she doesn't have to.

### How do I find an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting?

Call 1-888-4AL-ANON or visit [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org) for meeting information in your community. Al-Anon may also be listed in your local telephone directory.

# In denial, I didn't understand why I needed Al-Anon

By Charles S., New York

When my wife checked herself into the hospital for depression, the doctors told us that she was an alcoholic. I remember being surprised. I didn't see her drink very often.

She took long naps in the afternoon, sometimes for four hours. But I never imagined she could be drunk—just extremely tired. Once I found her with a half-empty bottle of peppermint schnapps. She was slurring her speech. “You know me. I don't drink,” she said. I shouted at her and poured the rest of the bottle down the sink.



I couldn't believe how she could lie to me like that, with the bottle in plain view. I didn't see my own denial, however. I usually ignored or minimized how much she drank. I didn't see anything abnormal in the chaos and stress her alcoholic behavior was creating for our family. I had no clue that I needed Al-Anon desperately at that time.

That's why I was surprised when the doctors said my wife was an alcoholic, even though I could remember several



times when she drank too much. At one Thanksgiving, for example, she made inappropriate remarks at the table and vomited on the drive home. But I continued to believe that my family life was “normal.” I didn't understand how the drinking was affecting me and our two kids.

A social worker at the hospital told me that I should go to Al-Anon, but of course I didn't think I needed it. After all, my wife had the drinking problem, not me. And now her problem was solved: she was getting therapy and was in A.A. Besides, I could only recall a few times when she drank. Step One says we are “powerless” over alcohol. But I didn't

feel powerless. I was managing my problem successfully. I was still minimizing the effects of my wife's alcoholism.

Al-Anon is a program of self-discovery, and at that time my eyes were still closed. I wasn't ready for any self-discovery. I didn't want to take a close look at myself because I was in too much pain.

I joined Al-Anon years later, after my wife left me, when I was in even more pain than before. No one in Al-Anon pressured me to “solve” my problems in a particular way. That was good because I didn't want anyone telling me what to do or what to think. I just went to meetings and Al-Anon members told their

## How will attending Al-Anon or Alateen help me?

Newcomers discover that they are not alone when they listen to other members' stories and hear how they apply the Al-Anon program to their daily lives.

Newcomers find hope and support when they meet other people who have experienced similar feelings, fears, and frustrations. They can learn how the Al-Anon program has worked for others. Al-Anon members find a better way of life whether or not the drinking stops.

own stories. Little by little, I absorbed small bits of wisdom that made a big difference.

Al-Anon worked for me because it is gentle and compassionate. The program doesn't force a solution on me. It gives me the freedom to find my own solutions, at my own pace. Al-Anon helps me to look at my life “One Day at a Time.” And little by little, I've come a long way.

# CAGE test helps professionals identify need for Al-Anon

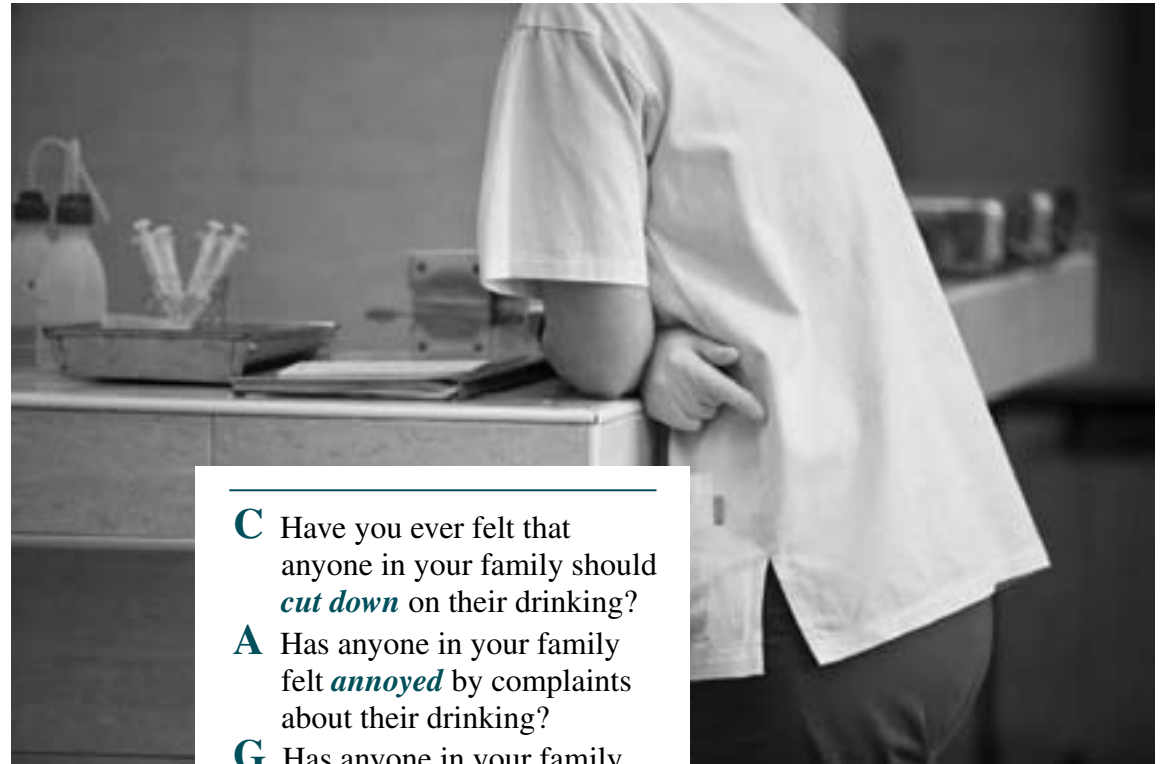
By Neil A. Capretto, D.O., F.A.S.A.M.

Neil A. Capretto is the Medical Director of Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania.

When I am working with people affected by someone's use of alcohol, I make a variety of suggestions, but almost always recommend Al-Anon. People referred to Al-Anon show significant improvement in their health, well-being, and total daily functioning. They tell me they find a degree of support, acceptance, and understanding in Al-Anon that they can find no where else.

In health care settings, there are many people who could potentially benefit from Al-Anon, but their need is never identified. Health care providers often struggle to find time to screen for patients who have been affected by someone else's drinking, which conservative estimates show to be at least 20 percent of the population. This statistic is unfortunate because, as in other health conditions, early identification is important.

There is a screening tool—the “Family CAGE”—that can help identify people who have been affected by someone else's drinking. The screening involves four short questions:



- 
- C** Have you ever felt that anyone in your family should *cut down* on their drinking?
  - A** Has anyone in your family felt *annoyed* by complaints about their drinking?
  - G** Has anyone in your family ever felt bad or *guilty* about their drinking?
  - E** *Eye opener*: Has anyone in your family ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady nerves or get rid of a hangover?
- 

One or more positive answers to the screen should be followed by a more thorough diagnostic assessment.

I have found the “Family CAGE” to be a helpful tool in my work. I try to encourage other health care providers to use it.

Once a health care provider has identified an individual impacted by another's drinking, I advise them to strongly consider making a referral to Al-Anon. I believe that once they see the benefits of Al-Anon, they will do more frequent screenings and make more referrals to Al-Anon.

# How do I know if Al-Anon or Alateen can help me?

It's easy to see the effects alcoholism has on the alcoholic. It's not as easy, however, to recognize the effect of alcoholism on the family and friends of the alcoholic. Here are some questions you can think about to determine if you are suffering from the effects of someone else's drinking. If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, Al-Anon/Alateen may be able to help.

1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Do you have money problems because of someone else's drinking?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you feel that if the drinker cared about you, he or she would stop drinking to please you?
5. Do you blame the drinker's behavior on his or her companions?
6. Are plans frequently upset or canceled or meals delayed because of the drinker?
7. Do you make threats, such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
8. Do you secretly try to smell the drinker's breath?
9. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?
10. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
11. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?
12. Have you considered calling the police for help in fear of abuse?
13. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
14. Do you ever ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking?
15. Have you refused social invitations out of fear or anxiety?
16. Do you feel like a failure because you can't control the drinking?
17. Do you think that if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be okay?
18. Do you ever threaten to hurt yourself to scare the drinker?
19. Do you feel angry, confused, or depressed most of the time?
20. Do you feel there is no one who understands your problems?

These questions point to the issues shared by people who have been affected by someone else's drinking. If you answered "yes" to even one of these questions, you may discover that Al-Anon or Alateen meetings could give you important insight into your situation.

## At 16, I found a way to grow beyond my family problems



*By Stephanie, Washington*

My father drank away the first 16 years of my life. I grew up seeing my parents fighting all night long and having to leave the house to stay safe.

When I was little, I used to let things get under my skin really easily. Anything and everything bothered me. I was shy, introverted, and very self-conscious. I thought that everyone was whispering about me.

In high school, I got involved with Alateen. It was a big step in my life. I came to understand what my father was really doing to himself, to my family, and to me. I understood that he could do what he wanted with his life, but I don't have to let it influence my thoughts and actions. By saying that, I shed my self-consciousness and the shell in which I

was constantly hiding. I broke free and started to become the person I really wanted to be.

In Alateen I learned that no matter how much I love other people and want the best for them, my personal health has to come first. I need to take charge of my life—and nobody else's.

Every day I am developing my character. I am becoming more outgoing. I'm at the point where people could say things to me or about me—and it doesn't matter to me anymore because I don't have to let what they say affect me. I have learned to "Let Go and Let God."

Because of what I have been through, I have a greater appreciation for life. Every day is a new page, a new chapter. I live my life "One Day at a Time."

# Struggling with a son's drinking problem

By Anne C., Tennessee

I am a certified counselor, active in my profession. My son's father had a doctorate of divinity in family counseling. We could guide others, but could not seem to say or do the right thing for our son.

Neither my husband's connection with God nor my professional knowledge and skill had worked. We didn't understand our son's alcoholism. The pain of failure contributed to divorce. Embarrassed, ashamed, and isolated, I attended—all alone—a family week at a treatment center.

Each morning, our social worker read a page from Al-Anon's *One Day at a Time*. I met people who were recovering from alcoholism with the help of A.A. Hope began to dawn.

At the end of the week, the director said: "Your loved one will be told to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. Your life has also been affected. You can best help your loved one by going to 90 Al-Anon meetings in 90 days."

Nothing else had worked, so I decided to try it. With meeting list in hand, I went to an Al-Anon meeting that very night. I learned: "I didn't cause it; I can't control it; I can't cure it."

What I found in Al-Anon was a fellowship of others who understood—who would share with me as I walked my own path of recovery, whether my son drank or not. I found spiritual principles



that gave new meaning to my life.

I am still learning in Al-Anon. Even when my son is drinking, I can say, with calmness and serenity, "I wish I could help you; you know I can't, and you know what to do. I love you." And he says, "I know. I love you too, Mom." The key for me was a professional who said, "Go to Al-Anon."



## Recognizing a pattern in my life

By Sheryl M., Ohio

I left an abusive marriage and found myself dating another alcoholic six months later. The realization that there might be a pattern to my behavior scared me. I also happened to be in domestic violence counseling with a counselor who wrote articles for the local paper on alcoholism and its effects on family members and friends.

While visiting a friend, she showed me an article that my counselor had written on the symptoms of a child of an alcoholic. As I read through the article and subsequent checklist, I found I matched almost all the criteria.

My friend had been raised by an alcoholic mother and had gone to Al-Anon. We found a local group and started going.

Through Al-Anon I have found so much peace and joy. My family has noticed the difference in me as I am calmer and less controlling. I now see the patterns of my life and how the pieces of the puzzle fit together.



# A therapist's perspective on the benefits of Al-Anon

By Nancy Badger, Ph.D

Often clients don't understand the effect alcoholism has had on their lives. They may come to me with difficulties in relationships, issues with family members, problems in school or at work, a sense of loneliness, or a lack of social support.

Through exploration, I learn the person having difficulty in relationships may be trying to fix or control a partner's alcohol problem.

I find that the person having issues with family members may be trying to be the mediator in a problem due to a family member's drinking.

I notice the person having problems in school or work may not be able to focus because he or she is too busy worrying about someone else's drinking.

I discover that the person experiencing loneliness may have never learned how to trust and share openly because he or she was taught to keep secrets.

Al-Anon provides a lifelong support system that augments and reinforces what happens in therapy. Some of the benefits of Al-Anon are:

- A sense of belonging by identifying with others who have experienced the same kinds of dilemmas and difficulties.
- Coping strategies for dealing with negative emotions.

- A sharper focus on one's own goals and aspirations, rather than on someone else's drinking.
- Mutual support, a healthy alternative to keeping secrets and trusting no one, behaviors typical of those who grew up in an alcoholic home.
- A structure for spiritual healing, discovering a sense of self-worth, and developing positive relationships.

When I refer a client to Al-Anon Family Groups, I explain the differences between Al-Anon and therapy. My clients decide what works for them.

In Al-Anon meetings, people share their experiences and hear how to work the principles of the Al-Anon program. They are encouraged to share more personal information with their Sponsors or with Al-Anon friends after the meeting. In this way, clients can choose whom they want to trust, if they wish to share more intimate details. This opportunity helps develop a relationship skill that most members of alcoholic families don't learn otherwise.

My hope is that more professionals will consider how Al-Anon can help their clients obtain full, productive lives and use Al-Anon as a resource whenever a client is affected by someone else's drinking.

*Nancy Badger is the Director of the Counseling and Career Planning Center at the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga.*

## Go to a meeting with an open mind

“I urge you to go to an ‘open’ Al-Anon meeting and see the diversity of individuals who attend these meetings.”

—Linda Varin, Registered Clinical Counsellor,  
British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors, Sechelt, BC

## You can learn a lot at an Al-Anon meeting

“Alcoholism is a family disease, and recovery is as essential for the family as it is for the alcoholic. My experience has shown me that the families who recover together have a much better chance of staying together.”

—Robert Lindsey, President and CEO,  
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, New York, NY

### Do I need an appointment or referral to attend meetings?

No advance notification is necessary to attend Al-Anon or Alateen meetings. Most groups have a member serving as a contact who can be called for information about the group, Al-Anon or Alateen in general, or for directions to the meeting location.

## To help the alcoholic, you’ve got to help yourself

“If the family doesn’t also travel the road to their own recovery, the alcoholic isn’t going to make it on his or her own. The strength of Al-Anon is that it helps families build self-confidence, spirituality strengths, and the often stark realization and acceptance that being the cop, being victimized by the alcoholic, or rescuing the alcoholic isn’t working, and will never work.”

—Richard G. Thibodeau, Executive Director,  
National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems, Lake Orion, MI

“Someone said at a meeting. ‘It’s okay to love an alcoholic.’ My life has never been the same.

“At Al-Anon, I found my voice and courage. I lost my anger and began to laugh again. After years of a committed Al-Anon program, my life is happy, my marriage healthy, and serenity rules my days.”

—Linda G., Ohio



“It is in the rooms of Al-Anon that my greatest healing takes place. I am accepted for who I am. I am not judged. I sit and listen. Does it work? Of course it does, as long as I am willing.”

—Susan M., British Columbia

“I felt lost when I came to my first Al-Anon meeting. Filled with shame, guilt, and fright, I pushed myself to get there. These people had gone through similar trials, but I could sense the feeling of serenity exuding from each in their own way. With their help, I could face myself and realize that I hadn’t created this problem—as much as I felt guilt over it—and I couldn’t control or cure it.”

—Jean M., Florida

## What about problems other than someone’s drinking?

Members often have other concerns and worries in addition to problems caused by someone’s abuse of alcohol. It’s not unusual for the problem drinker to have other addictions, mental illness, or other issues.

Al-Anon’s principles are applicable to many different situations, but the Al-Anon program focuses on helping people recover from the effects of someone else’s drinking. At Al-Anon meetings, it is understood that people have many issues, but discussion during the meeting time is limited to issues related to alcoholism.

# Family recovery can aid the alcoholic's recovery

By Opal Cameron, BSW, MTS

*Opal Cameron is a Registered Social Worker in Shell Lake, Saskatchewan.*

*“Many alcoholics have found recovery because the spouse found Al-Anon first. The whole family benefits from Al-Anon. And so do we professionals.”*

Alcoholism is a disease of denial by the entire family. It is one of the first areas I check out in the initial interview. It is easy to miss the real source of the problem.

Because of denial, I explain the illness and its effects on the entire family.

I ask direct questions because people just don't walk in and admit they're alcoholic or that a spouse or close relative is an alcoholic. How much a person drinks is not as important as the behavior that follows the drinking and the effect it has on others.

If I suspect there is alcoholism in the home, I refer the spouse to Al-Anon. Regardless of whether the alcoholic is willing to get help or not, it is important for the partner to know where to get support and find valuable information. Because Al-Anon members truly understand, clients receive support, friendship, and an openness they will never find in any other organization or club. They all have something in common.

Many alcoholics have found recovery because the spouse found Al-Anon first. The whole family benefits from Al-Anon. And so do we professionals.

I keep a list of all local Al-Anon meetings and give it to my clients. I have a list of Al-Anon contacts and make arrangements for someone to pick my client up and take him or her to a meeting. I have also taken them to a meeting, introduced them to someone, and made sure they felt comfortable before leaving.

It may seem like going a step too far, but the payoff—seeing clients become their own persons with dignity and a sense of belonging, recognizing their worthiness to themselves and others—is worth it. These clients discover a whole new outlook on life and develop healthy relationships with their family, friends, and relatives. The greatest insight for the spouse and the family is: “It doesn't have to be that way anymore.”



# How Al-Anon helps my clients

By Lou Block, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Certified Addictions Professional

*Lou Block is a published author and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Certified Addictions Professional in Spring Hill, Florida.*

Al-Anon is an essential component in therapy for any client affected by the alcoholism of a family member, friend, or co-worker.

I've seen how Al-Anon enhances the work I accomplish in my clinical practice. I've found that people who love the problem drinker will do anything possible to help them. But they don't have a clue about what works or the part they play in the family disease of alcoholism. Most spend their time covering up for the alcoholic; taking care of the alcoholic's responsibilities, including bailing them out of jail; and making a warm, safe place for them to land after they have fallen.

Al-Anon helps my clients understand how to stop enabling. By identifying with others in the same predicament, my clients begin to understand what works and what doesn't work, what part they play in their dance with the alcoholic, and ultimately what they have to change in their behavior. These changes are necessary in order to extract themselves from the emotional web the alcoholic weaves. Of course, it is up to the client to change.



*“Al-Anon is cost-effective for clients because attending meetings and listening to others in the same situation shortens the time the client needs to spend in therapy.”*

## What does Al-Anon or Alateen cost?

There are no dues or fees for Al-Anon or Alateen membership or for attending an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting. Most groups pass a basket to collect voluntary contributions to pay for the group's expenses, such as rent for the meeting room, support for their local services, and other group needs.

Al-Anon is cost-effective for clients because attending meetings and listening to others in the same situation shortens the time the client needs to spend in therapy.

If clients remain in Al-Anon and do what the program suggests—attend meetings regularly, get a Sponsor, study and work the Twelve Steps, and help newcomers—they will eventually gain the tools necessary to break the unknown hold alcoholism has had on them and the lives of their family.

# Searching for answers, an A.A. member finds help in Al-Anon

By Greg S., Minnesota

I had been in A.A. for a year. I thought I had a program, but I couldn't understand why I would go to A.A. meetings, give everyone a hug, and then go home and scream at my family. Sobriety was not enough. I had a problem with my family and my alcoholic father.



I talked to my A.A. Sponsor about it. He asked, "Have you ever thought about going to Al-Anon?" I thought that Al-Anon was a "bunch of gals" who gathered together to "back stab" their alcoholic husbands and boy-friends. Really, who needed them?

I was rather shy with women then, so I was uncomfortable when I saw 50 women and only a few men at my first Al-Anon meeting. I felt like that square peg in a round hole. I believed that if I shared what was going on in my life,

they would think I was a lunatic.

But as I listened, I realized that we were all experiencing the same things. I, too, wanted to control the alcoholic and reacted to the alcoholic's behavior with anger, resentment, and hatred. It was "doing a number" on my A.A. program.

In Al-Anon I realized that I was powerless over the alcoholic's drinking. I also realized that I was in Al-Anon to help me live my life in peace and serenity amidst all the turmoil. I was accepted for who I was. Growing up as I did, it was difficult to accept that I was loved, and even more important, that I could love.

The keys in my path to recovery were acceptance and surrender. I was miserable because I wanted the alcoholic and all my family to change. After all, I was trying to change. They should too. As long as I held that feeling in my mind and heart, I would continue to be miserable.

Little by little, I began to have compassion for the alcoholic. I knew how I had hurt all those years. Now, I realized that they, too, were hurting. It took awhile but I learned to accept them for what they were and not what I wanted them to be. I was no better than they were. By the grace of God, I was able to find the help, peace, and love that I



needed. Now, I can extend that peace and love to my family.

It's been a long time since that first Sunday night Al-Anon meeting. The alcoholic in my life has passed on. Three days before he died, the God of my understanding allowed me to make my peace and amends with him. I miss him and love him dearly. I love my family more than ever. There is a lot of peace in my heart. For all this, I say, "Thank you, Al-Anon!"

**Al-Anon welcomes everyone whose life has been affected by someone else's drinking. Those of us who are members of other Twelve Step programs, including Alcoholics Anonymous, avoid openly revealing this at meetings, so that our focus can remain on the Al-Anon approach to the family disease of alcoholism.**

# Al-Anon meetings create opportunity for self-discovery

By Shelley Brierley, M. Ed., CCC, RCC

*Shelley Brierley is an individual, relationship, and family therapist who has owned and operated Oasis Consulting, Ltd. in Vancouver, British Columbia for the past 25 years.*

## Who can attend an Al-Anon or Alateen meeting?

Anyone troubled by the effects of someone else's drinking can attend, whether the drinker is actively drinking or not; at home or away; living or deceased.

Alateen is our program for younger members, usually in their teens. Most Alateen groups meet at the same time and place as an Al-Anon meeting.

Encourage newcomers to visit several groups and to attend at least six meetings so that they can find a group where they can comfortably relate to the other members.



I believe one of my roles as a therapist, counselor, and trainer is to educate my clients, helping them recognize the patterns of their behaviour and the roles they play in their relationships. My job is to help people determine the kind of person they wish to be, gain emotional strength, and recognize what they *do* have control of—shifting their focus from others' behaviours to their own.

Most clients are unaware that their caretaking is in itself a form of addiction. Once individuals gain awareness, they can begin to put plans into place to move them in the direction of becoming the person they want to be.

The most important step in this process is to develop a support network that will encourage them to stay true to themselves. The ultimate goal is to help individuals learn to listen to themselves, trusting the “quiet voice within.”

In my experience, Al-Anon is one of the most useful resources that I rec-

ommend to clients. It provides people with a support group and a safe place to be honest with themselves—and to forgive themselves. This support allows them to begin to be more open with others—a behaviour that is new for many of my clients.

Al-Anon also provides clients with peers who can support them in claiming their autonomy and encourage them to focus their attention on themselves. Al-Anon members, having participated in such behaviours themselves, are aware of the patterns of behaviour involved in dysfunctional relationships.

Advice-giving is avoided. Sponsorship is encouraged, making possible relationships that foster self-awareness of controlling or self-defeating behaviours. These behaviours, once believed necessary for survival, have actually damaged their relationships. This new understanding helps them to focus on



themselves and become the people they want to be.

Just as I encourage clients to check out more than one therapist, I encourage these clients to “try on” several different Al-Anon groups until they find one where they feel a fit, where they feel they can connect with others.

# To an alcoholic, with love

By Gloria R., California

You're an alcoholic. I thought you needed me, that's why I fell in love with you.

It was easier to delve into your drama than to look at my own issues. I wasn't the problem; you were. If only I could fix you, we could live like normal people, happily ever after.

With blinders on, I didn't want to acknowledge your alcoholism as a disease. It's very hard, you see, because you weren't losing your hair like a cancer. It's a disease of the soul, and your soul was the last thing I was privy to. Mentally, I know you have an illness. Still, some days it's hard for me to accept your actions as part of your disease.

I lectured, blamed, and scolded you for not being able to hold onto a job, drinking yourself into oblivion, and making yourself so sick you wanted to die. But I wasn't accepting you for who you are. I was angry that you didn't fulfill my lofty expectations and I reacted by attacking you with a torrent of hateful, vindictive words. I was holding onto my need for you to be what I wanted you to be. I should have looked at myself before casting stones. I added to the hatred you already felt for yourself. I am very sorry.

I'm ashamed of the things I did in the name of loving you. I wrote your résumé and set up job interviews. I drove you all over town. I covered for your illness so that your aging parents have no clue to this day that you end each night drunk,



with a bottle in your hand, and begin each day with a new bottle.

I spent money I didn't have to give you what I thought you needed. The more loving and helpful I tried to be, the worse you became—and you turned away from me.

I let you use me and exploit me. But what did I get in return? You weren't there for me when I needed emotional support. Adding insult to injury, you'd lie about where you've been or who you were with. You'd make promises that gave me hope—and I always believed you.



I persevered in our relationship, even in the absence of affection and intimacy. I lied to myself that you loved me anyway. I accepted even the most mediocre gesture of caring. You shredded my heart and yet, I kept that ember of hope alive, thinking that maybe this time it will be different, maybe this time he will realize just how much I mean to him. I still thought you would become the man I always knew you could be.

Was I in love? Or was I obsessed? You have your alcohol and your demons. I love you. You are my drug of choice.

You were my world, you were my life. It was too painful for me to watch you dying before my eyes. I was lost and out of control. My pleas, threats, and ultimatums didn't work. I had no more strategies to try.

Realizing my powerlessness, I got down on my knees and prayed. By the mercy of God, I found Al-Anon.

In Al-Anon meetings, I shared my story with others and learned that their stories were mine also. By listening to their experiences, I came to understand that you will find your own path, in your own time, without my help.

Whether you're in my life or not, I still think about you. I still care about you and love you. But I've pulled my expectations down from the stratosphere. I'm exploring joy, forgiveness, and gratitude instead. More and more with each day's passing, I'm finding love for myself and my own life.

# Al-Anon provides comfort to single mom

By Elaine H., Missouri

Before I became a member of Al-Anon, I felt alone all the time, even though I had two daughters to care for. I could be in a room full of people and still feel alone.

The loneliness was part of my childhood. I thought if I had a family, I wouldn't be lonely anymore. But living with an alcoholic was too much for me. I left him when I was pregnant with my youngest daughter.

One of the most stressful things in a one-parent family is making all the decisions for yourself and your family. Sometimes the worry and stress was overwhelming. Even though the alcoholic had been removed from our lives, the family disease of alcoholism was in our home all those years.

When I finally made it to my first Al-Anon meeting, it was the first time I was with people who understood my feelings. In Al-Anon, I found an inner peace and have not felt alone.



## Why should I attend Al-Anon or Alateen when the drinker is sober?

Even though sobriety offers a new beginning for the restoration of family life, it also brings a new set of challenges and adjustments. Problem drinking affects every member of the family, and the recovery of family members from the effects of the drinking can aid the recovery of the problem drinker. In Al-Anon, members learn to identify and focus on their own issues without confusing or complicating matters for the drinker.

# Newcomer finds hope at first meeting

By Sandra R., Kentucky



Last night I attended my first Al-Anon meeting because I was so tired of the life I had with my alcoholic (and only) child. As each member told of an experience they had with a loved one, I thought my head was going to explode. I realized every person there was me—we were living the same experiences with our loved ones.

When it came time for me to speak, I voiced my anger and shame. I expressed my feelings of emptiness. And I felt support like I had never felt before.

After the meeting, I said to my daughter, “You work your program, and I’ll work mine.” She replied, “It will affect you more if I don’t work mine.” I said, “No, it will affect you more if you don’t work your own program. I have my own program to work.” I could already tell I was on my way.

This morning I find myself wanting to read everything I can get my hands on about Al-Anon. It is a way I can show my daughter how much I love her and at the same time love myself.

# Facing reality: a young college graduate's story

By Samantha K., Colorado

When I graduated from college two years ago, I couldn't wait to start my life. I moved to another state to live with my boyfriend, found a job, and bought a car. My life was headed in the right direction. At that time, I had been with my boyfriend for over two years. I had only seen him drunk once.

We had parties at our apartment, but they usually didn't get out of hand. The night before I started my new job, however, my boyfriend passed out in the hallway and vomited in our roommates' bedroom. At Christmas, I couldn't put the tree where I wanted to because he and his friends decided to build a three-dimensional pyramid out of empty beer cans—around 200 cans in total. It was not their first “beer-amid.” I just about had enough when one of his friends urinated in the living room.

Still, I didn't consider my boyfriend an alcoholic, though his drinking was causing problems for me. These incidents were “rare occurrences”—just young kids trying to have a good time. I wasn't a partier, yet I didn't think drinking every so often was an issue—but really it was.

When my boyfriend finished his contract with the Navy, he started looking for jobs. I was excited about moving out on our own. Our relationship was rocky, but I knew that living alone—just the two of us—would solve our problems.

As time went on, things didn't get better. He wasn't excited about his job prospects. He had more free time than before, and the drinking became more



*“I knew I needed a meeting, but I was reluctant to go. I wasn't ready to accept that the reality of my life was nowhere near the fantasy I had dreamed.”*

frequent. It wasn't every night, but he was drinking—and getting hammered—more than I cared for.

One particular night, we went to a hockey game with our roommates. The drinking started around 3 p.m. By the time I got home from work, they were all smashed. I knew it wasn't going to be a fun night.

At the game, my boyfriend was loud, rowdy, and obnoxious. He was tripping and spilling his drinks everywhere. I couldn't believe they were still serving him!

Before long, I was in the lobby crying

because I was so embarrassed. Friends, strangers, and even the cops came to check on me. I felt hopeless. But I couldn't leave because I was the designated driver.

I had been to Alateen and my mother is a member of Al-Anon. I knew I needed a meeting, but I was reluctant to go. I wasn't ready to accept that the reality of my life was nowhere near the fantasy I had dreamed.

I eventually made it to a meeting but didn't say much. It was awkward and uncomfortable; I was so much younger than everyone. But I was surprised at how well I related to the people there. I wasn't the only one affected by someone else's drinking.



It took some time before I felt totally comfortable, even though the members were always welcoming. I still don't say much, but I know I'm in the right place. It's comforting to know that I'm

## Why do members continue to attend Al-Anon or Alateen?

Al-Anon is a program of self-discovery and personal growth—and long-time members continue to learn about themselves and to grow spiritually. Al-Anon is a supportive fellowship of people who have had similar life experiences and share a commitment to improving their lives. Members form new and lasting friendships with other members. And there is great personal satisfaction in sharing the Al-Anon program with newcomers who are confused and suffering from the effects of problem drinking.

not alone and that with time and work I'll be alright.

My boyfriend moved back west, and two months later we broke up. My heart breaks to know that my relationship with my boyfriend wasn't what I hoped it would be, but with the tools of Al-Anon in hand, I've been able to rebuild my life. I have my own apartment and I got a promotion. I look at my life and my relationships more realistically. I try not to have expectations that ultimately lead to resentments; I'm working on forgiveness. It's still hard, but “One Day at a Time” things get easier.

# In Al-Anon, I gained new perspective on family conflict

By Anonymous, Canada

Growing up, I wondered what a “normal” life would be like. I hated being different. I hated having to go home to a house consumed with anger and hatred, constant arguing, and drinking.

My role model for a potential partner was a man who drank himself into oblivion, came and went as he pleased, and told my mother she “wasn’t going to tell him what to do.” My mother was obsessed with keeping everything in order. She was constantly cleaning the house, condemning my father’s behaviour, and seizing every opportunity to make my father look bad and invite pity on herself.

I can recall many verbal battles between my brothers and my father surrounding his drinking. Although I was a passive child, at times I was right in there with them.

When the opportunity arose, I moved as far away from “home” as I could—which took me all the way across Canada. I vowed I would never live this life.

My father’s disease eventually caught up to him and he passed away. I was fortunate to be able to make amends with him before he died. I still see the



repercussions of the disease of alcoholism in my mother, and had I not gone to Al-Anon I would not be able to enjoy and love the person she is now. I know that my parents did the best they could while I was growing up.

Although I vowed to lead a different life, I ended up living exactly the life I was brought up in. Alcoholism is an insidious disease and, if not addressed, consumes the entire family.

On what I thought was the verge of insanity, I made my first call to Al-Anon. The person who answered

the phone sounded so calm and peaceful—and I wanted that. I went to my first Al-Anon meeting and have never looked back.

Although my husband is still drinking, I am able to accept him for the person he is and not the person I think he should be. I am not as consumed with wanting to change him. I continue to heal myself by working the Al-Anon program, which includes daily reading of literature and practicing the Twelve Steps. The rewards have been worth it.

## What do members talk about at Al-Anon or Alateen meetings?

Most groups have a discussion topic at their meeting, such as acceptance, overcoming fear, change, or one of the Twelve Steps. Each week, a different member chairs the meeting. Members share their experiences in applying Al-Anon’s principles to their personal challenges. Al-Anon and Alateen are mutual support programs, where members share their own experiences. No member gives direction or advice to another.



## Al-Anon Family Groups:

- Welcome newcomers with literature, a local meeting schedule, and an introduction to the program.
- Are mutual support groups with the single purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics.
- Include Alateen, for young people affected by someone's drinking.
- Are a nonprofessional group of peers, where members share their experiences and learn from each other in a supportive environment.
- Are supported by the sale of literature and voluntary contributions from members, and does not accept grants or other funding from outside sources.
- Have millions of recovery success stories. Members share their own stories at Al-Anon and Alateen meetings and in publications. Founded in 1951, Al-Anon Family Groups now number more than 26,000 meetings in 131 countries.

# Terms used in Al-Anon Family Groups

Al-Anon has some unique terms and sayings. This list includes some that you may find unfamiliar:

The **Twelve Steps** are a framework for personal and spiritual growth, based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. For more information, visit [www.al-anon.alateen.org/legacies](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/legacies).

Many Al-Anon members ask another member to be their **Sponsor**—someone they can turn to for help in understanding the program, who makes a commitment to listen and to share. The Sponsor respects their privacy, keeps what they say absolutely confidential, and respects their right to make their own decisions about the direction of their life.

Al-Anon Family Groups have no affiliation with any religion and do not endorse any particular religious belief. Many Al-Anon members believe in a **Higher Power** of their own understanding. Their concept of a Higher Power, however, is entirely personal and respected as such by other Al-Anon members. Personal beliefs are not subject to criticism or debate by other Al-Anon members who have their own personal beliefs.

Al-Anon is spiritual, rather than religious. We welcome people of any faith or of none. The universal **Serenity Prayer** is often used in Al-Anon meetings:

**God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.**


Al-Anon has a number of **slogans**, or short sayings, such as “**Easy Does It,**” “**Keep It Simple,**” “**Live and Let Live,**” and “**Let Go and Let God.**” The slogans remind Al-Anon members to keep their focus on the program during stressful times. These concise expressions of wisdom offer quick reassurance that we are able to cope with whatever life brings; they prompt us to take constructive action and treat ourselves and others with compassion and respect.

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Visit our Web site,  
[www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)



- **More information about our mutual support program**
- **More members' stories**
- **Samples of Al-Anon literature**



**If someone's  
drinking troubles  
you, attending  
Al-Anon Family Group  
meetings can help.**

**Three ways to find  
a meeting:**

1. Check your local phone book for an "Al-Anon" listing in the business or white pages.
2. Visit the Al-Anon Family Groups Web site at [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org) to find your state or province's Web site.
3. Call Al-Anon Family Groups' toll-free meeting line, 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666), Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time for meeting information in the U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico, and Bermuda.

# For local meeting information:

Call toll-free, 1-888-4AL-ANON,  
or visit: [www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)



Al-Anon Family Groups

Strength and hope for friends and families of problem drinkers