

Will the Hand of Al-Anon Be There?

Meeting designations may be confusing to newcomers and long-time members alike. Some are pretty clear, like “Families and Friends Only” or “Families, Friends, and Observers Welcome.” But what about all the others: Men, Women, Parents of Alcoholics, People of Color, Young Adults, etc.? Our Third Tradition states: “The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.” How do specific meeting designations focused on types of participants fit with the “only requirement for membership”?

When I first started coming to Al-Anon, I focused on all the differences between me and you. I thought I was too young at the age of 36! My disease told me that all the seasoned members (old and gray-haired like I am today!) who proudly announced they had been coming for 20

and 30 years were just inept at putting these simple Twelve Steps to work in their lives. But I discovered that unravelling the behaviors and attitudes of this family disease simply cannot take place overnight...since they didn't get there overnight! I am so grateful for their patience with me.

My disease also convinced me I was an outsider. I was (and continue to be) an activist, a Puerto Rican Jew, and a college-educated professional. How could I possibly relate to you or you to me? We were too different! Since I had no sense of self-worth when I entered Al-Anon, I could not imagine this feeling would change. Yet, I felt relief with each meeting I attended. It wasn't until I listened to that consistent Al-Anon message that I finally understood: the participant focus of a meeting did not and does not matter as much as the fact that we are here to help and support each other—because we are all affected by someone else's drinking.

Sometimes, we may feel more comfortable and safer in a meeting where there are people present who have experienced similar life challenges related to the family disease of alcoholism. Nonetheless, when we enter any Al-Anon meeting and hear the words, “We welcome you to this Al-Anon Family Group and hope you will find in this fellowship the help and friendship we have been privileged to enjoy,” we receive Al-Anon's consistent message of hope. Ah...relief!

I was welcomed no matter where I went, regardless of the stated participant focus, because of what Tradition Three affirms. There were many times when I could not identify with some of the personal sharings in a participant-focused meeting, but what I did identify with was the message of hope that prevailed as members shared how they practice the Al-Anon principles in all their affairs. This was not any different than reading something in our Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature from the perspective of, say, a husband of an alcoholic or a member of the LGBTQIA+

community. Though I am not either of those, I don't discount the message; I look for what I can learn from it to apply to my situation. I must also consider whether or not I am welcoming to members who are different from me when they show up at my home group meeting.

I belong in Al-Anon because I am the daughter, granddaughter, niece, cousin, sister, wife, and stepmother of alcoholics. While many of the active alcoholics in my life have since passed away, I continue to live with and love a long-time sober alcoholic husband and recently sober stepson. I need to be reminded that the effects of the family disease of alcoholism remain in my actions and attitudes, and that when I gather together with other relatives of alcoholics for mutual aid, I find help and friendship. I am grateful for the Al-Anon program and my Higher Power, which help reveal to me the work I must continue to do, always being ready to offer help and hope with outstretched hands.

By Sue P.,
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