

AL-ANON guidelines

The Shared Experience Of Al-Anon and Alateen Members.

Services in Correctional Facilities

G-14

Working with Inmates and Their Families

Statistics show that many inmates/residents are incarcerated as a result of alcohol and drug abuse and/or the effects of the disease. Establishing an Al-Anon or Alateen group in a correctional facility provides an opportunity for residents and their loved ones to learn about the Al-Anon program of recovery. As Al-Anon members we can share our experience, strength, and hope at prisons, jails, special schools, and detention centers.

STARTING A GROUP

Either Public Outreach or Cooperating with the Professional Community (CPC) Coordinators or chairpersons of local committees usually approach the facility to suggest starting a meeting.

The individuals at a facility who might be involved in initiating an Al-Anon or Alateen group are the staff working directly with an alcoholism/substance abuse program, a “family day” or a pre-release program. Other officials such as the warden, superintendent, head counselor, director, or chairperson of education may be helpful.

Once the Public Outreach and/or CPC committees have contacted the facility staff, and the need for a meeting is agreed upon, it takes Al-Anon members and groups to start the meeting and keep it growing. A meeting time that is acceptable to the administration and convenient for the residents and Al-Anon volunteers is necessary for success.



EQUIPMENT

Request a room furnished with tables and chairs sufficient for the meeting. Inquire about and follow facility regulations regarding refreshments, smoking, disposal of trash, and the arrangement of furniture.

REGISTERING THE GROUP

Registering the group with the World Service Office (WSO) is a two-part process. It begins by writing to the WSO specifying: the name of the correctional facility, the time, day and room where the group meets; whether it is for newcomers or a regular home group meeting; and requesting a proposed institutions group packet. Complete the registration form that is included in the packet and return it to the WSO.

The WSO will then send the new group a packet containing the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. It will also add the newly-formed group to the WSO mailing list.

TYPES OF MEETINGS

If the group meetings are for prospective members or newcomers, they usually are chaired by experienced local Al-Anon members. Due to the nature of the group and of correctional facilities, the group is usually registered as a limited access institutions group.

In short-term facilities, it has been suggested that only Steps One, Two, and Three be discussed. If the group is in a long-term facility, the group could hold discussion meetings. In that case, the inmates could take a more active part in the meeting. Whether for newcomers or a general meeting, correctional facility groups are usually not open to the public.

ATTRACTING MEMBERS

Ask to announce the day, time, and location of the meeting. Inform counselors, chaplains, and prison officials. You may ask to place notices on bulletin boards or in prison newspapers telling residents of the availability of Al-Anon. Introduce Al-Anon to the residents by briefly explaining Al-Anon’s purpose.

MAINTAINING FACILITY RULES AND REGULATIONS

Adhering to the facility regulations is essential. Most of these rules are for your personal safety. While regulations may vary from institution to institution, most of the following are standard practice:

- Pre-clearance (three days to several weeks) and a driver’s license or other ID is required for entry.
- Identification badges or passes are issued at the main gate.
- Don’t give your full **name, address or phone number** under any circumstances to inmates or residents. An Al-Anon information service mailing address and telephone number are sufficient.
- *There may be requirements for members in meetings to report dangerous or threatening behavior by the inmates. Each meeting must weigh this legal requirement with our Traditions of anonymity and address it appropriately at each meeting.* One suggestion is to read a statement at meetings which reiterates the Tradition of Anonymity and states the reporting requirement of the facility. That way the

inmates know what the members are required to report.

- Never bring in or carry out messages.
- Carrying the Al-Anon message to residents does not require knowing about their personal lives or criminal backgrounds.
- Always maintain and protect the resident's/inmate's anonymity as well as your own.

LITERATURE FOR THE MEETING

Some facilities allow hard cover books, but some do not. Staples are usually removed and the literature must be searched before it can enter the facility. Literature sent into correctional facilities usually must be approved by the staff. If an AIS is nearby, make sure the phone number is stamped on all Conference Approved Literature (CAL). Supply the correctional officers with CAL. Design a flyer requesting the Al-Anon groups in the district to donate literature and ask the district to send it out to all the surrounding groups. Type the slogans in big fonts and use them as a handout. Donations of old *Forums* are highly valued; or ask groups to give subscriptions to the facility. Also, see CAL catalog for softcover books available from the WSO.

WORKING WITH INMATES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Allow family participation in the meeting. Keep Al-Anon's focus. To arrange for inmates or residents to attend Al-Anon/Alateen meetings after their release, provide phone numbers of information services nearby and furnish meeting schedules; some members may make themselves available to released inmates. Treat inmates as equals, just because they have made some bad choices doesn't make them bad people. But remember, you could be dealing with some potentially risky people who do not have the philosophy of the Al-Anon program.

Al-Anon members involved in institutions service and inmates working a Fourth and Fifth Step need to know that sharing a Fifth Step with a member is not considered "privileged." It might be best that a Fifth Step be shared with a clergyperson since their conversation is *protected* communication and is not subject to disclosure.

THE AL-ANON TRADITIONS AND MEMBERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

While Al-Anon does not have rules and regulations, there are guidelines based on a sound application of the Traditions. It is always necessary to remember our primary purpose: to help families and friends of alcoholics. To avoid being diverted from our spiritual aim, Al-Anon does not lend its name to any outside enterprise nor does it offer an opinion on outside issues. Tradition Twelve states, "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities." *Remember, juveniles are especially sensitive to their anonymity.*

- Members who sponsor the meetings should be sure to follow the Al-Anon/Alateen format.
- It is important to understand that many residents may be members of both Al-Anon and AA or other self-help

programs. They may need extra encouragement and help in separating the Al-Anon program from other Twelve Step fellowships or group therapy.

- It has been suggested that members should emphasize that Al-Anon is not affiliated with the institution, as it states in Tradition Three.
- Keep your focus on not endorsing the facility, lending our name to the facility, and not giving any indication that we are affiliated with the facility according to Tradition Six.

SEVENTH TRADITION

Tradition Seven states that we are "fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." Therefore, Al-Anon groups do not accept literature or monetary donations from the facilities.

Many facilities have restrictions regarding their residents' possession and use of money; consequently, those responsible should follow the rules of the unit and assess the financial circumstances of the inmates before deciding if a collection should be taken. A collection basket is not usually passed at an institutions group for newcomers or at presentations for beginners, families, and staff.

Groups in the surrounding district or the information service/intergroup can be asked to provide literature or financially assist with group expenses. They can also have fund-raisers to support the institutions groups. Some fund-raising ideas are: dinners, round robins, or workshops, as suggested in the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. Funds have also been raised by:

- member donations — send around a separate basket each week for contributions to be used for institutions groups
- support from district or institutions committee funds — list as a budget expense
- the AIS/intergroup could offer financial support through its institutions committee. See *The Best of Public Outreach* (P-90) for more ideas.

EXCERPTS OF A LETTER FROM ONE MEMBER INVOLVED IN INSTITUTION SERVICE

I help facilitate the Al-Anon meeting for women in maximum security. Currently we have two sponsors for this meeting and between a few and a few dozen inmates at any given meeting...

...We have been able to give copies of *Courage to Change* to most women who regularly attend these meetings...

Recently the topic was "feelings"... There were many tears and much laughter shared within the circle.

This meeting is a humble place, in the true sense of the word, a place to come to terms with who I am for each of us. I am comfortable here. We care about each other. I love this meeting in a very special way.

COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY!

Building and maintaining a level of trust with correctional facilities, staff and residents is crucial. Communicate regularly with the staff.

Share your experiences involving the institutions groups or the facility with local Institutions Committees, Public Outreach or area Institutions Coordinators and the WSO. And be enthusiastic!