

How Do We Address Diversity in an Inclusive Group?

PRESENTATION

Hello, my name is Joyce, GR at MI Al-Anon AFG District 11 ☺. If someone had told me I would be standing here before you to present RLGL at Assembly, I would have thought they were nuts! Well, I hope not, because here I am. (hahahaha)

A few weeks ago I raised my hand when our District Representative, Sue M. asked if anyone wanted to help out at Assembly, all you have to do is some research on this here RLGL topic that our district is responsible for “How Does Al-Anon Address Diversity in an Inclusive Group?” and speak for about five minutes. Ok, easy enough I thought. Well, as it turns out, not so much.

But, here goes; As members of Al-Anon, we learn that Alcoholism is a family disease, affecting not only the drinker but those closest to them, including spouses, parents, children, friends, employers, and others. Relationships are stressed or distorted¹, while we struggle to “control” or handle the situation by ourselves. In Al-Anon we learn that we are not alone, Al-Anon is a **spiritual** program not a religious one, we can be helped no matter what our religious beliefs. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, Traditions, & Concepts, acceptance of a higher power/God of Our Understanding, the serenity prayer, attending meetings, as well as reading CAL, and using Slogans.

Alcoholism does not discriminate and neither does Al-anon. Newcomers are encouraged to try several different meetings, as you may find one or another that is more suitable. People of all ages, ethnicity, religious affiliations or lack thereof, race, in short, **Diversity**, people like me who are or have been affected by someone’s drinking.

Well, first and foremost, the answer can be found in the Al-anon Statement of Purpose, (<http://www.al-anon.org/pdf/afamagazine.pdf>, 2016)

“Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism was the title of Al-Anon’s second book, published in 1965. This magazine (like that book) includes articles by Al-Anon members and treatment professionals who share their personal perspective on how **Al-Anon Family Groups can help people troubled by someone else’s drinking. Al-Anon cooperates with therapists, counselors, and other professionals, but does not affiliate with any organization or professional. Articles written by Al-Anon members do not speak for Al-Anon as a whole, but reflect only their own personal experience with Al-Anon Family Groups.**”

This same theme is echoed throughout the Al-Anon program by way of Conference Approved Literature (CAL), meetings, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the Twelve Concepts of Service. Al-Anon exists in its most elemental form the meeting place, where family and friends of alcoholics can gather together in fellowship with others who live, or have lived with the problem of alcoholism. From the moment a newcomer walks into a meeting they are given their very first piece of CAL – typically a newcomer packet, welcomed to Al-Anon, and quickly acclimated to our, “ala-loony”, “ala-lingo” – Anonymity, detachment, no cross-talk, etc.,

“Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.” (Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual 2014–2017, 2016)

¹ “Any family, wife, and children, who have had to live with an alcoholic a number of years are bound to be rather neurotic and distorted themselves. They can’t help it.” Bill W., cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous P-4