

Inside Al-Anon Family Groups

My Group Isn't Following "the Rules!"

My skills in navigating conflict were nearly nonexistent when I arrived in Al-Anon. My options were all or nothing—either fight my way through in a desperate effort to be recognized as being right, or walk away in silence, feeling small. I was awestruck to learn in Al-Anon that I had other choices. I could ask questions instead of making assumptions, and I could even discern which conversations I should participate in.

When my children were young, they would get into squabbles about anything and everything—what show to watch on television, how loud the volume should be, which seat should be occupied by whom. By this time, I had been attending Al-Anon for a few years, so I would overhear the commotion without stepping in to resolve their disputes. In frustration, they'd cry to me, "Why aren't you helping?" I'd quietly explain that I was allowing them to find their way through the conflict. While that wasn't the answer they were hoping for, it provided them with choices about how to handle the situation.

These children were affected by the family disease of alcoholism. Since they were too young for Alateen at the time, the only recovery I could offer them was my example. I made the conscious choice to engage in recovery instead of reacting to the family disease that we all lived with. The tools I offered them included pausing to gain an understanding of the truth of the matter, determining if they were contributing to the conflict, taking turns speaking instead of yelling at each other, and recognizing the right to disagree and

make alternate choices. Now, as adults, my children have some conflict resolution tools to help them navigate various situations.

The Group Services department at the World Service Office (WSO) regularly receives calls from members asking the WSO to step in to resolve group issues. Some members become frustrated when they learn that the role of the WSO is to help interpret Al-Anon's policies (as found in the "Digest of Al-Anon and Alateen Policies" section of the current *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* [P-24/27]) and to encourage groups to apply Al-Anon's Legacies and spiritual principles to resolve group issues. The Group Services team also offers resources to help carry out the will of the World Service Conference and guidelines based on shared experiences from members, groups, and links of service. They share a wealth of experience, strength, and hope via many communication methods.

When I share with members the paths available to resolve conflicts, I'm reminded of the lessons my children and I learned. We are all here in Al-Anon because we've been affected by the family disease of alcoholism, and the disease can rear its head when we least expect it. The tools of understanding, information, and choices empower us to restore health and harmony when conflicts occur. Members may wish to hear, "Thank you for contacting the WSO; we'll take care of it right away." But that would take away the groups' opportunity to "practice these principles." When members have access

to these resources, they can share them with their groups, helping to convey a clear and consistent message of the help and hope Al-Anon Family Groups provide.

Attending a meeting filled with dominance, outside affiliations, and/or various dilutions of Al-Anon's message can be frustrating. It can be easy to walk away with judgment, hoping someone else will come along to "take care of it." However, our goal is for every newcomer who is in despair to arrive at their first meeting and find the help and hope we have been so privileged to enjoy. I believe it is important for me and every member to do our part to help keep our groups healthy so that we can continue to offer that support. To achieve this, I ask myself: What resources can I use to help inform my group? How can I encourage my fellow members to talk to each other and reason things out together?

By Christa A., Group Services & Alateen Coordinator

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