

What Happened to Our Group Binder?

As a longtime Al-Anon member who has attended numerous in-person meetings in two states, I was accustomed to the practice of the meeting chairperson using a binder to lead the meeting. Since joining the World Service Office (WSO) Staff and moving to Virginia Beach, Virginia, I have attended several local meetings and encountered an unfamiliar practice. Three of the meetings routinely use *Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work (P-24)* and follow the suggested meeting outline, reading directly from pages 10–19 of the booklet. Multiple copies are available at each meeting, allowing members to follow along and participate in the reading of the materials.

After noticing this difference, I wondered, “What happened to the Group Binder, and why do some groups use one while others do not?” The history of the Group Binder service tool dates back to 1997, when the WSO developed the binder and sent it by postal mail to all newly registered groups. Initially, it was mailed to new groups as well as those already established within the World Service Conference Structure. The binder was intended to provide groups with resources and suggestions for conducting meetings. It included sections on Group/Area Records, Suggested Meeting Format, Group Tips & Topics, Literature/Service Materials, and Group Finances. Each section contained resources to support its respective topic.

The Group Binder was discontinued in 2007 when the “Al-Anon & Alateen Groups at Work” section of the *2006–2009 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27)* was expanded and reorganized. To better serve the groups, the Executive Committee approved discontinuing the mailing of binders to new groups effective January 1, 2008. Newly registered in-person

groups now receive three mailings during the first year after registration. These mailings contain basic materials for newly formed groups, such as Al-Anon Guidelines and pamphlets, information about group finances and literature, and table cards. Links to these same resources are sent to new groups meeting electronically.

In addition to being included as the first section of the *Service Manual, Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work* (P-24) has been printed as a separate booklet since 2008. This change made it more cost-effective and provided members with easy access to basic group information and the meeting format. *Groups at Work* is also available as a free download on the al-anon.org website. The electronic format offers the added benefit of allowing members participating by phone or online to access the familiar format with ease. While using the meeting format provided in *Groups at Work* rather than the Group Binder was a change for me, I see the value of having an up-to-date resource that is easily accessible to both in-person and electronic groups. Seeing a stack of *Groups at Work* booklets on the table when I enter a meeting now brings a comforting sense of familiarity.

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