

Al-Anon Family Groups and the Helping Professions

The 2006 Al-Anon/Alateen Membership Survey (details at www.al-anon.alateen.org) showed that 40 percent of adult Al-Anon members and 25 percent of Alateen members identify a professional referral as a key factor in their decision to attend their first meeting. Al-Anon/Alateen meetings are compatible with all types of professional treatment.

Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, Inc., publishes a magazine each year for the purposes of public outreach called *Al-Anon Faces Alcoholism*. In it, they include articles from professionals in the medical and counseling fields who describe the benefits they have seen in their patients/ clients who have attended Al-Anon/Alateen.

Here are some excerpts from the 2008 issue:

A doctor says:

"I began to recommend Al-Anon because I noticed that in many cases the family was sicker than the alcoholic. When sobriety became a way of life for the alcoholic, often the spouse or child of the alcoholic continued to suffer with anxiety and worry. They still felt guilty and constantly tried to check up on the alcoholic. They were showing up in my office for physical ailments more often than the drinker!

People who have been deeply affected by someone's drinking are easy to spot if you ask the right questions. They have a lot of fear, worry, and apprehension over the alcoholic. They neglect themselves and place all their attention on someone else. People who have tried Al-Anon come back to the office more relaxed. It's as if a big burden has been lifted from their chest. They no longer focus on the alcoholic. They are taking better care of themselves and seem to be enjoying life more, even if the alcoholic goes back to drinking."

A clinical therapist says:

"The three classic rules of growing up in an alcoholic/dysfunctional family, don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel, are so true.

Often when clients seek out counseling, these rules dominate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Unfortunately, self-imposed silence, after many years, becomes suffering. The silence turns into depression and anxiety, social isolation, and despair. Some clients become despondent; others act out (addiction). Whatever the case, clients feel little or no choice in life....

Al-Anon/Alateen provides an environment where other people, with similar experiences, come together to share their struggles and hopes, fears and accomplishments. Through Al-Anon/Alateen, clients become intimately connected, something that is absent when living in an alcoholic home. The message of the program is that there is hope and help available....

Through Al-Anon/Alateen, the silence is broken and with a renewed purpose in life, group members continue to deliver the message of self-discovery, healing, and hope to others."

A treatment center director says:

"I try to teach the families that recovery is not just for addicted individuals, but the whole family. Recovery is manifested by honesty, connectedness to others, decreased anxiety, trust and self-worth. Al-Anon allows individuals to experience recovery from the brokenness that is typical of alcoholism. Al-Anon allows individuals to stop playing the game of being the cop in the family, the victim, the protector, the rescuer. It allows people to just be themselves without having to carry the addicted person."

Are You Troubled By Someone's Drinking

Millions of people are affected by the excessive drinking of someone close. The following questions are designed to help you decide whether or not you need Al-Anon:

1. Do you worry about how much someone else drinks?
2. Do you have money problems because of someone else's drinking?
3. Do you tell lies to cover up for someone else's drinking?
4. Do you feel that if the drinker cared about you, he or she would stop drinking to please you?
5. Do you blame the drinker's behavior on his or her companions?
6. Are plans frequently upset or canceled or meals delayed because of the drinker?
7. Do you make threats, such as, "If you don't stop drinking, I'll leave you"?
8. Do you secretly try to smell the drinker's breath?
9. Are you afraid to upset someone for fear it will set off a drinking bout?
10. Have you been hurt or embarrassed by a drinker's behavior?
11. Are holidays and gatherings spoiled because of drinking?
12. Have you considered calling the police for help in fear of abuse?
13. Do you search for hidden alcohol?
14. Do you ever ride in a car with a driver who has been drinking?
15. Have you refused social invitations out of fear of anxiety?
16. Do you feel like a failure because you can't control the drinking?
17. Do you think that if the drinker stopped drinking, your other problems would be solved?
18. Do you ever threaten to hurt yourself to scare the drinker?
19. Do you feel angry, confused, or depressed most of the time?
20. Do you feel there is no one who understands your problems?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, we welcome you to learn more about Al-Anon by visiting www.al-anon.alateen.org or calling toll-free 1-888-4AL-ANON for a meeting in your community.

Note: The professional opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Al-Anon Family Groups. Al-Anon does not endorse, support, or oppose outside entities, opinions, or issues.