

## **Anonymity**

The experience of our groups suggests that the principle of anonymity—summed up in Tradition Twelve as “the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions”—has three elements: There is anonymity as it applies outside Al-Anon/Alateen, governing our contacts with general public, the media, and professionals; anonymity within the fellowship; and anonymity as it contributes to our personal growth.

### **Anonymity Outside Al-Anon/Alateen**

#### ***Anonymity and the General Public***

When dealing with the general public it is important to use discretion in revealing one’s Al-Anon/Alateen membership. In settings where there is no media involved (health fairs, speaking to community groups or schools, etc.), members are free to use their full names, if they are comfortable doing so.

#### ***Anonymity and the Media***

Tradition Eleven gives a specific guideline: “we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV.” It is Al-Anon/Alateen policy to interpret Tradition Eleven to include the Internet as well as all forms of evolving public media. Personal anonymity in the media guards the fellowship from the Al-Anon/Alateen member who may be tempted to seek public recognition.

When speaking or writing as an Al-Anon/Alateen member in any form of press, radio, films, TV, Internet, or other evolving public media, members use only their first names and last initial or pseudonyms. Members can also speak without identifying themselves or sign articles “Anonymous.”

Photographs, video, film, or Web postings in published or broadcast media should not reveal full face images of those identified as members.

On any Web site accessible to the public, whether an Al-Anon site or not, full names, phone numbers, or other identifying information are not posted, if they are identified as belonging to an Al-Anon/Alateen member.

(See “Anonymity in Al-Anon/Alateen Publications” in the “Anonymity Within Al-Anon/Alateen” section)

#### ***Anonymity and Professionals***

It is important to make Al-Anon/Alateen known through our public outreach work with the many types of professionals who come into contact with families suffering from the effects of someone else’s drinking. When working with professionals, Al-Anon and Alateen members are more credible and effective when they give their full names and contact information. While personal anonymity is not required in outreach to professionals, it is helpful to inform the professionals of the importance of anonymity and confidentiality in Al-Anon/Alateen.

Note: Alateen members must comply with local laws and their Area Alateen requirements regarding personal anonymity in all public outreach work.

#### ***Electronic Communication Outside of Al-Anon***

E-mail provides a quick and easy way to communicate the Al-Anon/Alateen message to the media and professionals. Members' business e-mail addresses should not be used for Al-Anon/Alateen outreach, as they could imply affiliation, and may not be confidential to the member.

Web-based communication, such as on-line audio/visual materials (e.g., Web casts or podcasts), social networking sites, and blogs, provides members with easy access to distribute information about Al-Anon/Alateen recovery to a large audience. In keeping with Tradition Eleven ("Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members."), members who use this type of communication outlet must maintain their personal anonymity and that of any Al-Anon/Alateen or A.A. member, as the Internet is a form of media.

### **Anonymity Within Al-Anon/Alateen**

Members use their full names within the fellowship when they wish. The degree of anonymity a member chooses (first name, pseudonym, or full name) is not subject to criticism. Each member has the right to decide.

Regardless of our personal choice, we guard the anonymity of everyone else in the fellowship, Al-Anon/Alateen and A.A. This means not revealing to anyone—even to relatives, friends, and other members—whom we see and what we hear at a meeting.

Anonymity goes well beyond mere names. All of us need to feel secure in the knowledge that nothing seen or heard at a meeting will be revealed. We feel free to express ourselves among our fellow Al-Anon members because we can be sure that what we say will be held in confidence.

### ***Anonymity at Open Meetings and Al-Anon/Alateen Events***

At open Al-Anon meetings, group anniversaries, conventions, or workshops where non-members may be present, Al-Anon and Alateen members are free to decide how much anonymity they prefer. It is well to begin these meetings with a brief explanation of the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions. One suggestion is as follows:

There may be some who are not familiar with our Tradition of personal anonymity in any form of press, radio, films, TV, Internet, and other electronic media.

If so, we respectfully ask that no Al-Anon, Alateen or A.A. speaker or member be identified by full name or picture in published, broadcast, or Web-posted reports of our meeting.

The assurance of anonymity is essential to our efforts to help other families of alcoholics, and our Tradition of anonymity reminds us to place Al-Anon and Alateen principles above personalities.

At any function that records its speakers, members need to be aware that some recorders have Web sites that are open to the public. If speakers use full names, their sharings, including full names, could be posted, which violates the principle of anonymity.

### ***Anonymity in Service***

In Al-Anon/Alateen service positions (Group Representatives, District Representatives, Coordinators, World Service Conference members, etc.), it is practical to use full names and addresses to facilitate communication.

### ***Confidential Mailing Lists***

Confidential mailing lists are maintained throughout our service structure by groups, districts, Areas, and the WSO. Care must be taken that members' identifying information from these confidential lists is not made available to the public in published materials or posted on public Al-Anon Web sites.

### ***Service Communication***

Service communication via e-mail is expedient and efficient, but care and common sense must be taken in its use, particularly in forwarding messages. Use of blind copies protects members' anonymity. Members should select with care the e-mail address(es) they use to conduct Al-Anon/Alateen business. It is recommended not to use members' full names in them. Business e-mail addresses might not provide privacy and could imply affiliation.

- Current Mailing Addresses (CMAs), Group Representatives (GRs), and other trusted servants sending information by e-mail to group members take care in the wording of e-mail subject lines and use an e-mail address that protects anonymity as the e-mail addresses to which they are mailing may not be private.
- E-mail addresses of trusted servants are assumed to be private. Electronic correspondence sent among the links of service may include the name Al-Anon or Alateen.

As postal correspondence is delivered by public means, letters (including the return address) to an Al-Anon or Alateen member should never have the name Al-Anon or Alateen on the envelope. The WSO uses "AFG, Inc." on envelopes sent to members in order to protect anonymity.

### ***Anonymity in Al-Anon/Alateen Publications***

In all publications available to the general public, personal anonymity is maintained. Although the WSO requests that member submissions to WSO publications include full names, addresses, and phone numbers, the WSO publishes the material signed with first name and initial, "Anonymous," or a pseudonym. Service arm publications follow the same publishing policy when distributed outside the fellowship.

Publications and other materials meant for members (such as flyers, reports, letters, e-mail messages, newsletters) that identify members by full name or provide members' phone number or address can be posted on Al-Anon/Alateen password-protected Web sites. Posting material meant for members on Web sites that are not password-protected could result in publishing a member's full name, which violates the principle of anonymity. (See "Anonymity and the Media" in the "Anonymity Outside of Al-Anon/Alateen" section.)