

MEMORANDUM

TO: Conference Members
FROM: Executive Director
DATE: August 14, 2014
RE: Question regarding Al-Anon tagline and use of term "problem drinkers"

The WSO was asked at the 2006 WSC to send a copy of questions it receives from Conference members and our responses to all Conference members so that they can share leadership by responding to recurring questions in their Areas. The WSO believes that the following question and our response might be one of those topics.

Question: Several years ago the tagline was changed on World Service Office stationery from "Hope and help for families and friends of alcoholics" to "Strength and hope for friends and families of problem drinkers." Now this newer tagline is on several pieces of Conference Approved Literature. Has this change in Conference Approved Literature been approved by the World Service Conference?

Answer: Al-Anon is for anyone who is concerned about someone else's drinking, not only for those who have decided that the drinker in their lives is an "alcoholic." From its earliest days, Al-Anon has always used the terms "problem drinker" and "alcoholic" interchangeably. Using the term "problem drinker" instead of "alcoholic" in our tagline (whether used on stationery or on a book or pamphlet cover) did not require any decision by the World Service Conference, because it was not a change in policy, or a change in the way we have used those words for many years.

Yes, Tradition Five states that "Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics." That statement remains as important as ever. But use of the term "problem drinker" is not a change in our primary purpose. Determining that the term "alcoholism" must be used exclusively would be contrary to the example of our founders, and contrary to Al-Anon's policies and practices of the last 60 years.

Lois W. and other pioneer members wrote Al-Anon's first book, *The Al-Anon Family Groups*, in 1953-1955. The subtitle to that book is "A Guide for the Families of Problem Drinkers." The book's introduction states, "The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of the wives, husbands, relatives and friends of members of Alcoholics Anonymous and of problem drinkers generally....." Page 22 of that book states, "In the most serious stage of alcoholism, the problem drinker seems completely 'lost'...." Again, problem drinking is used as a synonym for alcoholism. This book, which was grandfathered in as Conference Approved Literature in 1962, has been continuously in print since 1955.

The Conference also approved the statement on page 81 of the "Digest of Al-Anon and Alateen Policies" section of the *2013-2017 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27)* under "Membership Eligibility." It states, "Anyone who feels his personal life is or has been deeply affected by close contact with a problem drinker is eligible for membership in Al-Anon/Alateen."

This statement is essentially unchanged since the first printing of the *Digest of Al-Anon and Alateen Policies* in 1975, when it stated, "Anyone whose personal life is or has

been deeply affected by close contact with a problem drinker is eligible for membership in Al-Anon.”

While there have been various taglines used over the years, Al-Anon’s purpose remains unchanged.