

Dear Al-Anon and Alateen Members -

Our Co-Founder Lois W. once said "Al-Anon is a program of love, and love is the primary motive in all our activities" (*Many Voices, One Journey* (B-31), p. 230). Perhaps this has never been more evident than at this moment in our history when we have seen so many members volunteer to take on new roles in their groups and to tackle the challenges posed by social distancing guidelines which affect the methods many of us normally use to share our experience, strength, and hope with each other. It speaks highly of our program of recovery that so many of you saw the need for meetings to continue and dedicated yourselves to making it happen. We are referring, of course, to the temporary use of electronic meeting platforms in lieu of face-to-face meetings.

When members of face-to-face groups first began to contact the World Service Office (WSO) about meeting electronically, we assumed their needs would be temporary. For WSO Staff, that meant "a couple of weeks." While we still believe this need will be temporary, we now accept that term means something more than a couple of weeks. We are offering the following guidance, based on the Twelve Traditions, to help navigate this new environment we find ourselves in.

We ought to be mindful of behaviors or decisions that can impact the unity of our groups (Tradition One). This could include the decision regarding which details to post about temporary electronic meetings and where to post them. Discussions of when and where to meet and how to publicize meetings have always been issues for our groups to decide using whatever means were appropriate for reaching a group conscience decision. Now is no different. Although one or two members may have taken the initiative to move the meeting to an electronic format, ongoing decisions about how this works are best made by the group, including deciding what meeting information is available to the public and through what channels. Meeting information can be shared on the al-anon.org online Meeting Search; an Area, District, or other local website; or through local phone contacts. Groups may choose to take advantage of some or all of these channels. The important thing is to remember that Tradition Five states "Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics." Members and newcomers must be able to find our meetings to receive the welcome and comfort only we can provide.

Financial decisions can also have an impact on group unity. Although our ability to meet in person has been limited, our responsibility to be self-supporting has not. We should consider carefully our options for collecting funds, how to meet our financial obligations, and how to spend our prudent reserve, if our group is fortunate enough to have one.

Although our meetings are open to anyone who suffers from the problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend (Tradition Three), it has recently come to the attention of the WSO that the safety and serenity of some meetings has been disturbed by attendees who have joined telephone and video conference calls for the sole purpose of disrupting them and disturbing the members of the group. This behavior has the potential to harm Al-Anon as a whole and should be looked at in light of the Traditions. Therefore, we urge application of the same principles in our electronic meetings as in our face-to-face meetings to keep members safe and preserve the unity of the group. We encourage two or three members of each group to become familiar with the security features of the chosen platform to ensure, at a minimum:

- Privacy settings safeguard the anonymity of all who attend-during and after the meeting
- Extreme, disrespectful, and distasteful outbursts are not allowed to occur or can be dealt with swiftly if they do

These, and many other security considerations, will need to be resolved regardless of the platform that's been selected. Therefore, we recommend that groups research these questions and take advantage of whatever technical advice is available from their selected platform. If a group has not yet selected an electronic meeting platform, our experience suggests that doing this research in advance and sharing it with members of the group will help everyone to make an informed decision. In all cases, our respective Higher Powers should be invited into these decisions.

Lastly, our groups should determine who has the responsibility to moderate the meeting and what authority is delegated to the person(s) in this role. Due to the nature of these platforms, this may mean taking certain actions that seem strange and different to many of us, such as requiring "registration of meeting attendees," establishing a "waiting room," and allowing the moderator to remove attendees from the meeting and bar their return. Although these may sound contrary to Al-Anon ideas, if we keep our spiritual principles close at hand, we are

likely to make reasonable decisions. Keep in mind, too, that *membership* in AI-Anon is a decision that is always reserved for the individual to make. "Attendee registration" for the purposes of being able to participate in an online meeting may simply be a technical requirement necessary for the use of such a platform; it is not a requirement for membership in AI-Anon. Attendee registration information is not required by nor stored by the WSO.

We want to thank you for the trust you have put in us to serve the fellowship and we are grateful for your support and patience.